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Young people's views on technology in their everyday lives

A University of Bristol Study for the ReConnect Project

The ReConnect Project, funded by the Wellcome Trust through an Engaging Science Grant (2016-7), aims for young people of all ages to understand the impact of digital technology on their daily lives, appreciating how much time they devote to social media and gaming, and opening up a window to offline activities.

In late 2016 the research team at the University of Bristol were invited to carry out a study of the ReConnect programme as a means of engaging young people and helping them explore ideas around their use of digital devices, whilst enabling them to form their own opinions and to make decisions regarding their health and behaviour.

This report is the outcome of that study.

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November 2017

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1 Key Findings

The ReConnect programme provoked a range of responses

Although a proportion of the more than a thousand students who participated in the ReConnect programme showed resistance and less than full engagement, there is evidence that for many young people the programme did have considerable impact. Students themselves and their teachers referred to ReConnect as *eye-opening*, *mind-opening*, *perspective-changing*, *enlightening*. Overall the programme appeared to have had a positive impact on a majority of students who were selected to participate in interviews and focus groups, and to have provoked a complex and nuanced range of responses. The qualitative data shows students involved in discussion of paradoxical concepts provoked by the programme, such as freedom and control, interesting and boring, enjoyable and hard, outside and inside, in relation to their experience and perceptions of technology use. There was ample evidence that young people can be thoughtful, reflective and insightful about the digital world and in some cases understood its complexity and could move beyond their own immediate experience of it.

Young people were surprised to find how much time they spent using digital devices

A strong finding emerging from the analysis is the central importance to ‘mind-opening’ of students logging time they actually spend on digital devices. The data suggest that this was the activity which had most impact on students’ attitudes. For many this was the trigger to making them more reflective about their device use and in some cases taking action to change their behaviour, unrelated to the disconnect challenge. It seemed also to be one factor in determining if they attempted disconnect. The act of logging was not easy, especially when done on paper, and students struggled with capturing the complexity of the ways they engaged with digital technology. However, the evidence of only a few days was often enough to make the point. An effective alternative, although it logged only phone use, was the use of one of the apps designed to track use.

Our findings about young people’s use patterns are consistent with previous research

The variation in patterns of use of devices amongst young people involved in the ReConnect study were consistent with those revealed by earlier research: namely that there were small numbers of extremely low and extremely high users, but the majority were in the middle; that young people who have strong social skills also connect with more people online, while those who are more shy and find socialising difficult are able to connect more easily with others online; that social networks are being used, by many, to extend social connectedness and strengthen social ties.

Young people’s time on their devices includes time spent watching films and video as well as playing games and communicating

As well as using phones or social media, as popular and as frequent an activity with many was use of a range of devices: gaming consoles, phones or tablets for watching video, including films, TV series and vlogs (via YouTube, Netflix and to a less extent FaceBook and Instagram). Consistent with findings of other research projects described in the review of literature, we found that smartphones were embedded in varied and multiple practices of work, care, pleasure and sociality, and young people’s descriptions of their use support the observation by other researchers that phone use cannot be disentangled from these practices in a simple and straightforward manner.

Dominant, and not always accurate, views and ideas about the dangers of technology appear to have been ‘received’ by young people, teachers and parents

The ideas of participants in the study (young people and teachers) about ‘too much’ use of devices echoed the prevalent media discourse around the dangers or drawbacks of digital devices. Teachers were concerned, some young people felt slightly uneasy and unsure about ‘time spent’ on devices. Perhaps in part as a consequence of this discourse, the approach taken by ReConnect was, in some cases, interpreted by students as aligned with the notion that young people *should* put their devices away and that switching off is good for them, and this met with considerable resistance.

Young people believed they should control their use of devices, but external help was often appreciated

Young people told us that they were the ones who should control the time they spent using technology, but examples in which they described themselves as readily able to do this were the exception rather than the rule. It was not uncommon for them to tell us that it was difficult to control the time they spent online. The social pressure exerted by the ‘negative feedback loop’ of constant messaging; the lure of ‘another episode’, the drive to reach another level: all were offered as evidence of challenge. The difficulty, in each case, was the effort or frustration in moving away from something they found compelling or worthwhile. Sources of external control were most frequently within the family, and forms of control were varied and included: polite requests to ‘come and talk to me’; rules about phones at meal times; rules about no phones in bedrooms, automatic wi-fi disconnection at a given time. The examples that predominated discussions of control involved: shifting from social activity with friends (on devices) to social activity within their families; shifting from online activity to sleep; and stopping playing games while in the flow of working to reach a level. Although young people often found parental interventions annoying and frustrating and sometimes described being angry about this, most saw parental rules and controls (when they were clear and consistent) as welcome and helpful to them in managing their device time and negotiating between ‘want to’ and ‘need to’.

Many young people felt that ‘balance’ is hard to achieve

Less than half of the survey participants said they were satisfied with the balance they had in using their devices. Well over half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that ‘people miss out on discovery or developing new interests if they spend too much time on technology’ suggesting that they were struggling with the idea of balance and also aware of maybe ‘missing out’. Some young people were aware that a ‘feedback loop’ was operating for them in the sense that they continued to use devices because other people around them were using theirs.

The availability of alternatives and perceived alternatives to spending time on devices varies widely for young people

The interpretation of reducing use is consistently one of stopping doing something that young people find compelling in order to do something that they find less alluring. A theme that emerged from young people’s descriptions of the role of devices in their everyday worlds was the absence for many, of valued ways of spending time that do not involve attending to devices. When asked to tell us about technologies in their lives one theme that emerged from students’ accounts was that use of devices was the means by which they alleviated or prevented boredom; they were very concerned that *not having* access to a device could mean that they would get bored. The dominant *imagined* alternative to using devices was ‘going

outside' (seen as the valued alternative to sitting at home), or increasing social contact 'outside' with friends. *Actual* alternatives, during a 'disconnect' week included increased contact with family members, often remarked on as unexpected and enjoyable. The perception of some young people of there being little available to them as alternatives to being online may function as a 'negative feedback loop', reducing the opportunities to find things to do, also possibly impeding them from developing habits of looking for such opportunities.

Disconnecting sometimes led to young people discovering ordinary, everyday activities that they enjoyed

It was not easy to persuade students to take part in making a pledge to disconnect. However for many of those who took up the challenge, (even in a limited way) the experience was also 'eye opening'. They discovered that there were things in the domestic environment that could hold their attention, and be pleasurable and satisfying. In this sense, the project was 'reconnecting' them to things around them. Some participants spoke of a resolution to spend more time involved in those things – playing with the dog, talking to the family, and so on. The question of whether they felt empowered by the experience, however, is less easy to answer. It was not clear that any of the young people who found it difficult to 'come off' their devices now felt that they had discovered their own agency in respect to their use.

Teachers' and Schools' commitment to the programme and attitudes and their success in mediating the programme content were important in determining student response.

The mode of delivery of ReConnect was different in each school, as was the motivation for implementing the project as explained by Head Teachers or Senior Leaders. While all shared concerns about device use, attitudes to digital technologies varied widely. In some groups most students were positive and engaged; in others resistance, shown by many, was associated with a defensive reaction to an early perception that the programme was designed to stop them using their devices. Many teachers expressed a view that overall the programme would be more successful if the approach and selection of resources was more open and less apparently judgemental, especially in the early stages.

Teachers in all schools were selective about the ReConnect Scheme of Work.

Teachers adapted, omitted and added to resources and activities to suit the students they were working with and the time available. were problematic where the programme was concentrated in a few weeks, or where it was located in subject areas where homework was not usually required.

In practice, both before and during the programme, teachers experienced very different amounts of support and opportunities to share experiences. This was largely a result of a differential allocation of resource time to facilitate this, or with accepted in-school protocols associated with different subject areas.

Senior teachers felt that the ideas in ReConnect programme were important and should continue to be included in the curriculum

Senior teachers felt that enabling students to articulate, discuss and reflect on their views, behaviour and experiences was important, as was finding opportunities for them to lead. However there were a number of practical issues to be faced in undertaking this kind of intervention: the demands that can be made on overburdened teachers; available teacher time; creating effective teacher teams; funding support and training to maximise positive outcomes for all.

2 Introduction

2.1 The ReConnect Project

The ReConnect Project aims for young people of all ages to understand the impact of digital technology on their daily lives, appreciating how much time they devote to social media and gaming, and opening up a window to offline activities.

ReConnect has developed a series of six lessons, (a Scheme of Work) for use in schools, which is designed to promote reflection and debate around screen-related issues. The Scheme of Work, consisting of lesson plans including PowerPoint slides and activities, is intended for PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic) or Enrichment classes at Key Stage 3 or 4, and has been devised in accordance with the national curriculum. The lessons were designed to cover the following topics: *screen take-up and uses; cognitive effects of being online – addiction?; health and wellbeing; safety and rights; offline alternatives; going forward - choice and taking control.*

During the penultimate week, pupils are invited to go offline completely or radically reduce their screen time, and engage in non-digital activities. The goal of this is for young people to have a digital break and reconnect with their offline selves for a week, and to resume using their screens at the end of the week in a more informed and balanced way.

More detail of the Scheme of Work can be found in Appendix xx

2.2 Research study

In late 2016 the research team at the University of Bristol were invited to carry out a study of the ReConnect programme as a means of engaging young people and helping them explore ideas around their use of digital devices, whilst enabling them to form their own opinions and to make decisions regarding their health and behaviour (without being influenced or directed to do so).

Qualitative research methods would be used in order to collect information which would enable the researchers:

- to investigate the ways in which the project has enabled young people to explore, articulate and discuss attitudes and opinions around the use of screens and digital technologies in the course of everyday life;
- to investigate whether and how engagement in the project empowers young people to be informed and autonomous decision-makers with respect their own use of digital devices;
- through this, to develop an understanding of young people's own sense of agency, autonomy and decision-making in respect to their use of digital devices.

3 Selective Literature Review

3.1.1 The context: what we already know and don't know

As is the case in many other parts of the world, young people growing up in the UK come to understand that they are living at a time in history that in at least one important respect is very different from that of the generation before them. They begin to realise that their own experience and expectations of finding and using information, whether for leisure, for learning, or for communicating with others, is perceived by older people as enabling them – even encouraging them - to think and act in ways that did not exist for their parents. They may recognise themselves in the term ‘digital natives’ if they hear it - and amongst what is said about digital natives, they will hear that there is anxiety and disquiet about the nature of their childhood and adolescence, and about their projected futures, such as:

Rates of teen depression and suicide have skyrocketed since 2011. It's not an exaggeration to describe iGen as being on the brink of the worst mental-health crisis in decades. Much of this deterioration can be traced to their phones¹.

Amongst the ills that are blamed on devices that teenagers and children use, and on the activities that they use them for, are low outcomes at school, obesity, and mental health problems. Other anxieties are that children and young people have access to aggressive, sexual, commercial, and value-related material that is inappropriate to their age - information which is delivered to them on individual, personal screens, and outside the sphere of adult intervention or guidance.

For each wave of highly-publicised anxiety about the dangers of the digital world there are balancing claims and voices of dissent. The contrasting perspectives to which young people are exposed are also part of the context in which they use their devices, and are the sources that inform their ideas as they make sense of the world as it exists for them.

This report begins by setting out what research has been able to tell us - about the dangers and risks associated with digital devices and the internet, and about young people's own opinions and whether they reflect the discourses around them. Of central interest is the notion of ‘balance’ - an idea predicated on the notion that time can, and should, be separated into ‘online’ and ‘offline’ periods; and the notion of ‘control’ or decision making about the delineation of those periods. If the ‘ideal’ trajectory for young people is towards balance, is it, or should it be, a shift from control being in the hands of parents, or other guiding adults, to control and choice being their own? What do we know about the development of autonomy, agency, and decision-making in young people? Is there something that makes this transition to autonomy especially difficult when the decision-making in question concerns digital devices and their use? Or, is the perception that digital devices are affecting young people's health, choice and control, something that we should revise?

3.1.2 What are the problems?

The most robust form of evidence about changes in wellbeing for young people over time comes from studies in which data is collected from representative samples of the population. Given the considerable investment of time and money that this requires, rigorous studies of

¹ Twenge, J. M. (2017). *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us*. Simon and Schuster.

this nature are carried out relatively infrequently. The result of this is that research that has been published about young people consists mainly of small-scale studies; and that large-scale research is unlikely to have focussed on technological devices and apps that have more recently become available. Two large-scale studies have collected information about wellbeing and young people in relation to digital media in the UK and Europe. These are EU Kids Online, which in 2010 surveyed a total of 25,142 children who used the internet, and their parents, across 25 European countries² and the What About YOUTH survey (formerly known as the NHS Local Health and Wellbeing Survey for Younger People), which collected data on a range of health behaviours amongst 15 year-olds³. To give an idea of the figures, at 120,115 the sample size of the What about YOUTH study is around five times that of EU Kids Online, and far larger than other surveys, for which a number of participants might be in the hundreds rather than in the thousands. For example, the US Pew Research Center's Teen Relationship Study research in 2015⁴ was conducted on a sample of 1,060, and the poll of parents and teenagers from which Common Sense Media produced its recent report about media addiction consisted of 1,200 US families⁵. Other examples can be found in a review of research by Spies Shapiro & Margolin, 2014⁶.

A recent investigation named *A large-scale test of the Goldilocks Hypothesis: Quantifying the relations between digital-screen use and the mental well-being of adolescents*⁷, well-publicised in television and newspaper reports⁸, analysed data collected as part of the What About YOUTH survey³. The data they used was information that young people had given about time they spent using screen-based technologies, alongside their scores on a wellbeing scale⁹. The study showed that teenagers' wellbeing *increased* as their screen time increased, up to a certain point. On the basis of this analysis, the team was able to describe thresholds over which increased screen time was associated with decreased wellbeing. Interestingly, these varied according to the digital device used, and whether teenagers played/were using it during the week or at weekends.

The researchers' hypothesis was that, in their words, *tech use at moderate levels is not intrinsically harmful and may be advantageous in a connected world, whereas "overuse" may indeed displace alternate activities, for example, interfering with school or with extra-curricular or other social activities*¹⁰. The thresholds at which wellbeing began to decrease were 1 hour 40 minutes for weekday video-game play and 1 hour 57 minutes for weekday smartphone use; for videos and using computers for recreational purposes, weekday thresholds were 3 hours 41 minutes and 4 hours 17 minutes respectively. For weekends, the

² Livingstone, S., Cagiltay, K., & Ólafsson, K. (2015). EU kids online II dataset: A cross-national study of children's use of the internet and its associated opportunities and risks. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 46(5), 988-992

³ The What about YOUTH survey was carried out in 2014 by Ipsos MORI for the Health and Social Care Information Centre. Further information can be found online at <https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=7894>

⁴ Lenhart, A., Duggan, M., Perrin, A., Stepler, R., Rainie, H. and Parker, K., 2015. *Teens, social media & technology From flirting to breaking up, social media and mobile phones are woven into teens' romantic lives*. Pew Research Center [Internet & American Life Project].

⁵ Felt, L. J., & Robb, M. B. (2016). *Technology Addiction: Concern, Controversy, and Finding a Balance*. San Francisco: Common Sense Media

⁶ Spies Shapiro, L. A., & Margolin, G. (2014). Growing up wired: Social networking sites and adolescent psychosocial development. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 17(1), 1-18

⁷ Przybylski, A. K., & Weinstein, N. (2017). A large-scale test of the Goldilocks Hypothesis: Quantifying the relations between digital-screen use and the mental well-being of adolescents. *Psychological Science*, 28(2), 204-215

⁸ see, for example Daily Mail (13 January 2017) *Screen time is GOOD for teen brains: Why 257 minutes is the 'sweet spot' before computers damage mental health and behaviour*. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-4118550/Screen-time-GOOD-teen-brains-257-minutes-sweet-spot-computers-damage-mental-health-behavior.html>

⁹ See Notes (Note 1) for a more detailed description of this scale.

¹⁰ Przybylski & Weinstein (2017), p.205

thresholds were 3 hours 35 minutes for playing video games and 4 hours 50 minutes for watching videos. Despite the media choosing to quote the thresholds as upper limits, the researchers had made no recommendations about the use of technology by young people. In their paper, they pointed out that the impact on wellbeing of use over the thresholds they had described was, in fact, smaller than the impact on wellbeing of not having a regular breakfast.

The different thresholds for wellbeing for weekdays and weekends comes about, they suggested, because the weekdays are relatively rich in opportunities for socialising and learning compared to weekends. The study *did* find a negative link between wellbeing and the use of technology when the technology in question was smartphones, and the period that young people were using them was the weekend. The researchers' suggested interpretation was that socialising via technologies when time is relatively unstructured (i.e. without external motivation, such as school timetables) requires people to make, and to implement, decisions to stop and change activity¹¹. This lent weight to their conclusion that *overuse of phones at weekends could displace other more enriching activities that could support well-being*. Other interpretations are possible; for example, young people whose circumstances lead them to being isolated from others at weekends and also to feeling down about themselves and their lives, may find themselves led to spending more time looking for social contact and distraction via their smartphones.

A study of technology and everyday life for young people provided a closer picture of their technology use and engagement in offline activities, such as sports and out-of-school and other clubs, and wellbeing¹². This study took place in the US in 2008-9; 708 teenagers and young people were surveyed, by telephone, at two points in time, around a year apart. The researchers were interested in the uptake of sports and club activities over the period and wanted to find out whether internet use impacted on young people's engagement in these activities; they also wanted to investigate the hypothesis that young people who experience depressive symptoms increase their use of media and reduce their social and physical activity. They found that teenagers and young people who were low users of the internet continued to be engaged in clubs and sports over the period, and the pattern was relatively stable. Medium users had become *more* involved in sports and club activities. This increase was not seen in people who were high users of the internet. The researchers also collected information on academic achievement, use of books and/or the internet to search for information, and use of the internet for communication. The picture that emerged was that the majority of young people were engaged in activities away from the internet and in fact used it to support their offline lives and identities. In order to study relationships between depressive symptoms, use of media, and social and physical activity, they asked young people whether they had experienced two weeks or more of sadness or hopelessness that interfered with daily activities. For some young people the occurrence of these feelings increased over the period of the study, namely those who were using the internet mainly for video game playing. The relationship was not considered to be causal; the research team felt able to conclude that factors that lead to depression amongst young people aged 14-22 are likely also to be drivers of both media use and depression symptoms.

¹¹ The explanation that the researchers gave was phrased as follows: *socializing through virtual means when time is otherwise unstructured may be particularly susceptible to dysregulation or may indeed displace other beneficial weekend social activities* (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017 p.209)

¹² Romer, D., Bagdasarov, Z., & More, E. (2013). Older versus newer media and the well-being of United States youth: results from a national longitudinal panel. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 52(5), 613-619

The finding that teenagers' use of digital devices generally supports what they do 'in real life' appears to be fairly robust¹³. There are young people whose use is perceived as problematic, but it's not clear that their lives are 'being destroyed by' technologies as the media might suggest. While there are certainly correlations between young people's use of technology and lack of wellbeing, the relationship is not necessarily causal; different factors may be involved, for example, there may be other issues leading both to low mood and to increased use of technology; it's also possible that an interplay of many different factors underlies the correlation.

As has been mentioned, poor wellbeing is just one of the perceived outcomes of young people's use of screens. Amongst the areas that have been scrutinised by researchers is the claim that social relationships are being affected by technologies. Here, findings suggest that young people who have strong social skills also connect with more people online, while those who are more shy and find socialising difficult are able to connect more easily with others online^{6, 13}; and that social networks are being used, by many, to extend social connectedness and strengthen social ties¹⁴. It seems, therefore that digital technologies can in fact provide more balance and, at least for some, can widen the horizons. This is not to suggest that there is no risk, for example, from negative feedback or unpleasant and aggressive behaviour from others, and the documentation of risks and their extent is a matter that is also carefully considered by much research¹⁵, in particular in the output of the EU Kids Online network¹⁶.

The value of careful academic studies, whether large-scale and representative, or smaller, more personal and more detailed, are that they remind us that it's impossible to substantiate a claim that technology is damaging the next generation; that we need to have a more nuanced view of what is 'too much', and that we should be careful of interpreting a correlation between the use of digital devices and dysfunction such as mental ill health in terms of a threat inherent in the use of the devices.

This is, of course, not to claim that there are no negative aspects of technology in young people's lives. Evidence from the Goldilocks study can be taken to suggest that negative aspects of young people's use of technology could be equated less with technology and more with missing out on opportunities for more rewarding activities, an observation that is consistent with the idea that underpins ReConnect: that displacement of other activities is an issue that is of particular concern. This in turn suggests that it is relevant to consider the availability of and access to other activities, as well as the way in which digital devices and media hold young people's interest and occupy their time. There is, after all, a widespread perception among technology users of all ages that people are spending more time interacting with screens than they *themselves* feel they should. As a fifteen-year old participant in a focus group study in Ireland commented: *If we were at a sleepover and we actually wanted to be sociable we would have to collect everyone's phones or else everyone will be on them the whole time*¹⁷, a statement which echoes the point made by the Goldilocks researchers that at

¹³ Kuss, D. and M. Griffiths (2011) Online Social Networking and Addiction—A Review of the Psychological Literature. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 8(9):3528-3552

¹⁴ Mihailidis, P. (2014) The civic-social media disconnect: Exploring perceptions of social media for engagement in the daily life of college students. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(9):1097-1071

¹⁵ Livingstone, S., Smith, P. (2014) Annual research review: harms experienced by child users of online and mobile technologies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 55, 635– 654

¹⁶ Livingstone, S., & Haddon, L. (2009) *EU Kids Online: Final report*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online. (EC Safer Internet Plus Programme Deliverable D6.5)

¹⁷ Kennedy, J. & Lynch, H. (2016) A shift from offline to online: Adolescence, the internet and social participation. *Journal of Occupation Science*, 23:2, 156-167

times when there is little external impetus to change activities, it can be difficult to decide just when to stop using a smartphone and then difficult to implement that decision. Young people may not be about to slide into a future of depression or hopelessness as a result of their use of screens, but their own frustration with some of the aspects of technology and everyday life is worthy of attention, as are the means by which they can experiment with and change their own everyday practice, and how what they choose to do is related to the activities of others in their immediate environment.

3.1.3 The opinions of young people

In 2015, the 5Rights organisation <http://5rightsframework.com> commissioned a debate that involved young people ‘putting the internet on trial’¹⁸ motivated by the observation that policy debates about children and young people online have tended to be limited in two important respects. Firstly, they are dominated by adults - often ‘experts’ who claim to know what young people need. Secondly, they have been dominated by a discourse of fear, the need to protect young people against predatory forces that make their online experiences inherently risky.

Amongst the thematic areas considered by the young people on the juries debated was the ‘The Right to Informed and Conscious Use’. The notion that some people use the internet ‘to excess’, was taken forward as an underlying theme in the recommendations that young people put forward to policymakers. The young people expressed their concern that digital media are designed to manipulate attention, and put forward a recommendation that children should be helped to exercise self-control.

The report makes it clear that young people themselves believe that it is common for young people to engage in ‘excessive’ use of digital media, which stands in contrast to the lack of evidence for this view from research on young people and wellbeing. There is currently no evidence to support a view that screens, apps, and technologies are so compulsive that the general population of young people is suffering and that they require help with controlling them.

It’s possible that the notion that young people are ‘out of control’ may arise from the discourse around young people; or it may arise from their own experience or observation of their peer group. Certainly, as the title of report indicated, there is a general current of thinking that the internet is a force and there needs to be organisation of people’s energies against some of its effects. The notion that the internet has its own agency was captured by some of the statements from young people, in particular:

We just need to stand up and stop the internet from taking us over

The report also includes suggestions that the remedy for ‘excess’ and ‘lack of control’ lies in the provision of opportunities for offline activities;

Awareness should be raised about human competitive nature.

People should be helped to make new friends and discover new hobbies.

Users should ask friends to intervene for them and find other activities.

¹⁸ Coleman, S., Pothong, K., Perez, E., and Koene, A. (2017) *The Internet on our Own Terms: How Children and Young People Deliberated about their Digital Rights*. CaSma Research

Children should be encouraged to socialise more when they are younger.
Schools should arrange more outdoor activities.

It's of particular interest that the statements that the young people make do not refer to their own agency for 'switching off'. The statements and recommendations that they made are generally that other people (adults, technology developers, policy makers) should intervene; they seem to be saying that something has to be done by someone else if young people are to achieve balance. Recommendations about excessive device use were:

Responsible adults and technologies should help children exercise self-control; specifically, the ubiquitous provision of time cut-off points.

Recommended usage periods should be publicised.

Social and technological tools to manage use should be more readily available.¹⁹

The ReConnect project is predicated on an awareness that judgement of young people and the way that they spend their time is a repeated message which many find boring and irrelevant if not irritating. The stated approach is that it *prioritises encouraging young people to experiment with how they spend their time, to question terms that are applied to them and their peer group - terms such as 'addiction' and 'screenagers', and to reflect on their own use.*

Given that the emphasis of the project is young people's agency, it is relevant to look at the knowledge that has been developed in psychology and neuroscience in relation to decision-making and agency in young people.

3.1.4 Understanding agency, autonomy and self-control

Psychological conceptions of agency vary from considering it as an internal strength to a more socially constructed set of skills. Different models would make different predictions for young people's ability to 'come off' their devices, and the help that they would need, if any.

The dominant theory of self-control in contemporary psychology refers to the ability to override thoughts and emotions, and is based on an idea of a tension between immediate gratification and delayed gratification. According to this theory, acts of self-control are based on a metaphorical resource - a kind of internal 'strength' which has limited capacity and needs renewal. The ability to inhibit responses relies on the availability of this resource or strength; hence, in situations when people are continually inhibiting their responses in order to allow the less dominant, appropriate responses to come forth, the resource becomes depleted, and failure in self-control is experienced²⁰.

A newer approach sees self-control as less about inhibition and strength and more about motivated switching between 'have-to' and 'want-to' goals. At the core of the model is an idea about 'balance' underpinned by an idea that switching between externally rewarded activity ('have to') and intrinsically pleasurable ('want to') is evolutionarily adaptive. An organism is engaged in a trade-off between more onerous 'have to' activities on the one hand, and 'want to' activities which are oriented towards exploration. To be adaptive, there needs

¹⁹ See Notes (Note 2) for an expanded version of these recommendations, taken from a draft of the 'Internet on Trial' report

²⁰ see, for example Baumeister, R.F & Tierney, J. (2011) *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*. Penguin.

to be flexibility in switching between what needs to be done and exploring the environment for other opportunities²¹.

According to this way of thinking, leisure activities using screens would correspond to ‘want to’ activities that are potentially adaptive because they support the exploration of different opportunities. Rather than continued use being a matter of self-control failure, the issue at stake lies in the skill of balancing between ‘have to’ and ‘want to’ which in turn is related to the nature of goals and rewards for the person in question. For adolescents, who are at a period in their lives where much of their decision-making is motivated by identity-development,^{22 23} - for example, achieving or maintaining status with peers, achieving personal goals, and finding independence, what may look like compulsive behaviour with screen-based technologies could be explained by the use of social media, games, and other screen-based activities being closely related to their goals of constructing personal meaning.

Putting aside their devices and engaging in offline activities would be less a matter of self-control in relation to the devices than the availability of offline opportunities to do things that are congruent with their sense of possible or future self or, in other words, goals of their own that they feel motivated to pursue. It’s possible to imagine young people for whom many readily available offline activities are perceived as ‘have to’ ones (participating in chores, for example) while all the ‘want to’ activities through which they feel able to explore who they are, what they could do and who they might be, are online. If being adaptive means becoming skilled at motivating one’s own switching between ‘have to’ and ‘want to’ activities, then, for these young people, for whom it would mean switching between online and offline worlds, becoming skilled at switching between ‘have to’ and ‘want to’ could be particularly difficult.

Another explanation for continual use of phones and devices, and one that also takes the emphasis away from accusing young people of a failure to develop self-control or be at fault in their decision-making, is that we use our devices more than we would *simply because that is what other people are doing*. This was shown clearly by some young researchers at the University of St Andrews. They gave people an app to record the use of their smartphones, through which participants logged, each time they used their phone, where they were and who they were with. Before they began to use the app, each person was asked to give the reasons they would use their phone in a social situation. Most said that this would be because a notification had come in, or because they received a call. However, the data from the app revealed that they turned to their screens and begun using them not because they had received an alert, but because other people around them were using theirs²⁴. If this is the case for the wider population, many of us are unaware of the social influence that leads us to use our phones more than we otherwise might, and the existence of what the researchers in this study identified as a ‘negative feedback loop’ that works against us ‘coming off’ our phones when we are with other people.

On the basis of the above, we can make several predictions that are relevant to ReConnect.

²¹ Inzlicht, M., Schmeichel, B., & Macrae, C. (2014) Why self-control seems (but may not be) limited. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 3: 127-133

²² Somerville L. (2013) The teenage brain: Sensitivity to social evaluation. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22:129–135

²³ Hartley, C., Somerville L. (2015) The neuroscience of adolescent decision-making. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Science*, 4:108–115.

²⁴ Eddie, T., Ye, J., & Stevenson G. (2015) Are our mobile phones driving us apart? Divert attention from mobile phones back to physical conversation! In *Mobile HCI 2015 - Proceedings of the 17th International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction with Mobile Devices and Services Adjunct*, 1082-1087. ACM.

Firstly, that the approach used by superficially comparable, but very different interventions²⁵, which are based on the notion that young people should put their devices away because there are abundant reasons why they should do so, and that switching off is good for them, are unlikely to succeed.

The second is that, if a project is perceived as being able to offer young people valued possible selves that incorporate offline activity, then young people may go on to further explore those identities. However, activities and resources that are offline and also support 'possible selves' and identities may be easier to access in some locations and social contexts than in others.

The third prediction is equated with the social influence, or the possibilities for breaking the 'feedback' loop that seems to be strongly influential in keeping people 'on' their devices, and refers back to the recommendation of the 'internet on trial' project that 'social and technological tools' to manage use should be more readily available. The prediction is that young people will benefit from the development of social conventions and technological interventions that will help them to manage their use. This leads to speculation about what managed use, or 'what's best', might actually be - for young people and adults alike.

3.1.5 Agency, autonomy and 'disconnecting'

What does it take to manage use and what would 'managed use' look like? Do we have a vision - and if not, what would it take to achieve one? In order to think more clearly about this question, two researchers from the USA have compared and contrasted two prevailing, popular, tropes or stories about 'ideal' use of smartphones: on the one hand, the phone as a device that removes the user from engagement in the real world, and on the other, the phone as a device that increases the user's autonomy and control, enabling them to manage tasks at times and places that they choose. They examined the values embedded in the stories and showed that both were characterised by visions of togetherness and community, productivity and effectiveness, as well as autonomy and control. The messages that are conveyed through these stories about the effects of 'staying connected' and of 'switching off' inevitably produce conflicting ideas about 'what's best' and how to achieve it, meaning that, as the authors of the paper go on to explain, people are struggling to locate themselves in the stories they encounter about smartphones. In their words:

Individuals do not have the agency to simply 'disconnect'. Everyone (...) is caught in multiple webs of expectation, involving colleagues, bosses, spouses, children and friends (...) Smartphones are embedded in varied and multiple practices of work, care, pleasure and sociality. They cannot be dis-entangled from these practices in a simple and straightforward manner²⁶.

Young people are growing up in a world where there are implicit demands on them to make sense of something that older people are still grappling with:

²⁵ See Notes (Note 2) for more detail about these studies

²⁶ Harmon, E., & Mazmanian, M. (2013) Stories of the Smartphone in everyday discourse: conflict, tension & instability. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1051-1060. ACM.

a world in which the stories of ideal ways of living in a world of smartphones conflict, leaving us bouncing between ideal states in the micro-comments of daily life²⁷.

We began this review of literature with a reference to a recently published book that claims that there is a deterioration in the mental health of young people (iGen) which is associated with the use of phones, a claim that caught the interest of the media, and, in the public imagination, serves to add weight to related anxieties expressed in the public domain. One significant example of anxiety and a desire for change is a letter to the Guardian signed by forty senior figures and published on Christmas Day 2016²⁸ calling for the UK government to provide guidance on the use of screens in childhood. This message is broadly consistent with LSE's Policy Brief²⁹, published earlier that year, which stresses the potential role for key players including policy-makers and industry to collaborate in supporting parents to provide guidance.

The LSE document reviewed what was available to parents in the form of screen time advice, analysing the types of recommendations that parents are offered. It comes as no surprise that a consistent theme in these recommendations was advice to limit screen time. Also, and in the authors' words:

only a small minority of sources of advice (...) emphasise to parents that children's use of digital media need not be all negative, that the role of parents extends beyond limiting and restricting, and that the difficult task is therefore to judge, and to balance, media-related opportunities and risks³⁰

The report goes on to point out that:

screen time now includes time for learning, entertainment, a conduit to relationships and information, a place for creativity and even civic action, as well as a source of problems and risk. The historical focus on screen time has been at the expense of supporting parents to assess the contexts in which their children use screens (where, when, why and with what effects), the content they are accessing (a minority of content is objectionable while the majority is innocuous or indeed positive), and the connections they are fostering through screens. Instead, a focus on time, restriction and monitoring leads many parents to assume that problems exist when in fact their children may simply be doing things differently from how they remember their own childhoods³¹

For those of us for whom the idea that we are all 'bouncing between ideal states' resonates with our own experience of technology, appropriate guidance for parents that does not dichotomise 'screen time' and 'real life time', would be welcome. The LSE report analyses strategies that parents use into four groups: Active Mediation, Monitoring, Parental Controls and Rules, and suggests that guidance would involve a blend of all four kinds.

²⁷ *ibid*, p.1060

²⁸ Guardian [25 Dec 2016] "Screen-based lifestyle harms children's health" [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/dec/25/experts-call-for-official-guidelines-on-child-screen-use> Accessed 3 September 2017

²⁹ Blum-Ross, A. & S. Livingstone (2016) Families and screen time: Current advice and emerging research. Media Policy Brief 17. London: Media Policy Project, London School of Economics and Political Science

³⁰ *ibid*, p.14

³¹ *ibid*, p.27

A blend of monitoring, rules, nagging, modelling and active involvement of parents with their children that might appear in such guidance, is expressed in an opinionated article published by Forbes magazine:

the very notion of ‘screen time’ is completely outdated (...) Screens are now a ubiquitous part of our lives. It is a technology that has been completely integrated into the human experience (...) parents need to be actively involved. Perhaps they even need to be hyper parents. (...) When parents nag their children, they are not only impacting today’s behaviors, they are also cultivating their children’s lifelong relationship to each particular nag. (...) Parents also need to help their kids learn how to engage with the digital world. We teach our kids how to talk to others—the proper restaurant etiquette, how to treat other people’s property, how to behave when walking down a busy city street. We need to do the same in digital world. (...) By interacting with you online, they learn how to interact with others³².

Young people are growing up in this world of difficult, conflicting messages in which parents and teachers find themselves struggling to evaluate ‘what’s best’ for themselves as well as for their children. This is the context in which the ReConnect project is set.

³² Shapiro, J. (2015, July) Parents Don't Need To Worry About 'Screen Time' Anymore. Forbes [online]. Available at: www.forbes.com/sites/jordanshapiro/2015/07/30/parents-dont-need-to-worry-about-screen-time-anymore Accessed: 3 September 2017

4 Methodology and Data Sources

4.1 Methodology and Methods

The research conducted into ReConnect was essentially a qualitative study.

4.1.1 Selection of schools

The ReConnect team identified six schools willing to participate in the research (referred to below as ‘study schools’). Each had chosen to include the ReConnect programme in the curriculum at some time between March and July 2017. The ReConnect Scheme of Work, written for teachers to use over six one hour lessons, was implemented in different ways. In one school a shortened version of the programme was developed by the ReConnect team in consultation with the school in order for it to run in twelve 25 minute Form Tutor sessions. Details of the how the programme was incorporated in each school appear in Section 6 of this report.

4.1.2 Research Design

The original research design involved a visit to each school at the end of the programme. On each visit a researcher would conduct six one-to-one interviews and two focus groups of 6-8 students. Participants were to be selected by the Lead teacher in each school. The research team requested where possible an equal mix of boys and girls, and students with a range of attainment. In addition the research team also requested interviews with the Head Teacher or member of the Senior Leadership Team who had instigated or supported the introduction of ReConnect in the school, the Lead Teacher, and at least one other teacher involved in delivering the programme.

As the research progressed the Reconnect team requested additional pre-programme data. This was arranged in two of the study schools where the programme was scheduled to start in May. The same students were to be interviewed or take part in a focus group before and after the programme. The Lead Teacher and one other teacher were also to be interviewed twice.

In the main the research design was followed. Some schools arranged more focus groups and fewer one-to-one interviews. It was not always possible for the interviews and focus groups where there was a second visit to duplicate exactly those on the first visit, but overall there was a high degree of consistency.

4.1.3 Selection of participants

Because schools took responsibility for selecting student participants, the research does not claim to be based on a representative or unbiased sample. Some schools tried to follow the composition of the participant groups suggested by the research team, and in mixed schools an equal representation of boys and girls was achieved. However, in the event, students were chosen on the basis of a range of criteria, different in each school. Examples of criteria used were: their willingness to participate, their positive response to the ReConnect programme, their negative response to the ReConnect programme, the value to them and their confidence, their ability to be articulate, or simply their availability at the time and on the day.

4.1.4 Instrument design

The interviews and focus groups with students and teachers were designed to gather information about a range of factors we believed were relevant to this study: participants personal histories and experiences with technology, their current patterns of use of digital

devices, their attitudes and beliefs about the digital world, their experience of the ReConnect project, their experience of ‘disconnect’ week, their views on the impact of the programme. In addition, interviews with Head Teachers and Senior Teachers explored the reasons for including ReConnect in the curriculum and ideas about sustaining this or similar interventions in the future. Interview schedules are included in Appendix XX.

4.1.5 Supplementary data collection

Information about the schools was collected from participants in the research and from outside sources. In two schools it was possible to observe some ReConnect sessions and to speak briefly with the teachers involved. Schools were also asked to invite parents to volunteer their contribution via telephone interviews. There was very little response.

4.1.6 Use of survey data

Across the six study schools, 1,040 students were involved in the programme. In order to contextualise the qualitative responses the research team elected to make use of data from surveys devised by the ReConnect team and administered in all of the schools with which they work. Teachers in the study schools were asked to enable students to complete a pre- and post- programme survey. There were also pre- and post- teacher surveys. During the programme the delivery of the surveys changed from Google Docs to Survey Monkey; there were also differences between the questions used on the two surveys, which resulted in differences in the data available. The response rate in some study schools was low for both student and teacher surveys. Nevertheless we felt that this information provided an opportunity to locate the qualitative data within a broader response and we draw on some of this information in this report.

4.1.7 Analysis

All interviews and focus group sessions were fully transcribed and analysed to identify emerging themes across the data that are related to the aims of this study. Survey responses were also analysed and quantified and, where possible, the outcomes were considered in relation to the qualitative data.

Areas chosen for focus in this report:

- Patterns of use of digital devices among young people in the study.
- Young people’s opinions of their own and others’ uses of digital technologies: concepts of balance, ‘too much’, control.
- Young people’s experiences of control and management of time spent on their devices, including their attitudes to interventions by others.
- Young people’s own sense of agency, autonomy and decision-making in relation to digital technologies.
- The challenge of empowering young people to be informed and autonomous decision makers: the importance of contextual factors; the impact of ReConnect.
- Experience of and response to the ReConnect programme as reported by schools: challenges and issues in delivery; assessment of impact by teachers.

4.2 Information collected from young people, teachers and parents

The following is a summary of the data collected, showing the numbers of pupils, teachers, and parents to whom we spoke. In Table 2 we show numbers of returns, by school, of students surveys of two different kinds, devised and administered by the ReConnect team, which they shared with us, and which we have drawn on in producing this report.

Table 1: Interviews and Focus groups held with young people, by school

School	Data collected	Year groups involved in project			
		Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
School A	Focus group	1	1		
	1:1 interview	4	5		
School B	Focus group			3	
	1:1 interview			5	1
School D	Focus group	6			
	1:1 interview	3			
School C PRE	Focus group	8			
	1:1 interview	5			
POST	Focus group	2			
	1:1 interview	3+2*			
School E PRE	Focus group		2		
	1:1 interview		5		
POST	Focus group		2		
	1:1 interview		5		
School F	Focus group		2		
	1:1 interview		5		

* Two of the students in the interview group for School C POST hadn't been present for the PRE interview

Table 2: Student Surveys completed by young people, by school

School	Google	SMonkey Q1	SMonkey Q2
School A	111	N/A	159
School B	57	N/A	0
School D	N/A	238	119
School C	N/A	101	41
School E		95	104
School F		16	0

Note: The ReConnect team had devised and administered different students surveys, using Google in one case and SurveyMonkey in the other. Different surveys were administered in different schools; the information was shared with us and we draw on some of this information in this report. (NB Numbers after data cleaned to identify double postings/duplicate responses)

Table 3: Interviews with school staff, by school

School	Staff name and role
School A	Head Teacher
	Senior Leadership Team overseeing the programme
	Two staff who were leading ReConnect in the school
	Year 8 Teacher
	Year 9 Teacher
School B	Principal, and the lead for ReConnect in the school
	Three Teachers involved in the programme
School C	Head Teacher
	ReConnect Lead (two interviews)
	Teacher (two interviews)
School D	Principal
	ReConnect Lead
	Teacher
School E	Assistant Head and PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic) curriculum leader, overseeing the programme
	Teacher and ReConnect Lead (two interviews)
	Teacher.
School F	Teacher and ReConnect Lead

Table 4: Classroom Observations, by school

School	Number of lessons observed
School A	1
School E	3

Table 5: Parent Interviews, by school

School	Number of parents interviewed
School A	2
School C	1

5 Young people's views on time spent on devices, balance and control

Drawing on data from surveys, interviews and focus groups we look at what young people thought about time spent on devices, reasons for using them, their idea of balance, and their attitudes to control. It should be noted that the surveys administered to the young people were not necessarily the same; the year groups were different in each school, and the response rates from schools indicate that the data rarely cover more than half the pupils involved. There are key differences between the schools: for example School A is a single sex girls school, and School B is a small technology-focused school with students mainly in Y10 and Y11, with a sprinkling of Y9, and mainly boys. For some areas of response the possibility for comparison between the schools is, therefore, limited.

5.1.1 Time spent on devices

Table 6: Students' estimated and ideal times spent on devices

	School A	School B *	School C	School D	School E	School F
Initial estimate of number of hours per day (mode)	up to 4	7-10	2-5	3-6	3-4	6-7
Ideal number of hours to be online (Q.11) (mode)	(question not asked)	(question not asked)	up to 2	3-4	3-4 hours	5-6
No. of questionnaires returned (survey 1)	113 (NB the students at this school completed an older questionnaire)	64 (NB the students at this school completed an older questionnaire)	101	212	87	16
Response rate	53%	63%	62%	90%	29%	

*School B is a technology academy for years 9-11. The pupils, mostly boys, are offered an education that prepares them for life/careers in the digital world

According the 'Goldilocks' study, young people's wellbeing is unlikely to suffer unless they are using smartphones and playing video games for more than three to four hours per day in addition to watching videos for more than four hours - meaning that they could be using technologies for eight hours per day and still be happy and well-adjusted individuals.

Amongst the young people involved in ReConnect who completed surveys at the beginning of the programme, very few reported using technologies for more than eight hours per day. Typical use was between 2 and 6 hours per day, but there was a notable difference within the schools and also between them, particularly between the responses of Schools B and F, and the other schools. This is likely to reflect specific features of these schools and their participation in the project, as follows; as well as being a technology academy, School B is located in a large city and students in the sample may be atypical, as they are selected by the school for their interest in digital technologies. Similarly, the small sample of students in School F was selected for participation in ReConnect because they were high users of digital devices.

Because of differences in the data source we have no information on the views of students in Schools A and B about ideal amounts of time to be online. However, for the remaining four schools there was similar variation in the typical response about ideal time to that of the

estimated hours per day spent. It is interesting that notions of the ideal were in many cases less than that of the estimated time actually spent.

5.1.2 What were the young people using devices for?

The survey asked respondents to put the activities for which they used their devices in order. The dominant activity in each school was social media. Watching video (e.g. YouTube) and films (e.g. Netflix) was often given as the second most frequent activity, but was also put in first place by a substantial number of pupils. Gaming, using a range of apps, was also given as the most frequent activity by some pupils, and internet-based study was also listed within the top three in some schools.

The interviews and focus groups revealed that it was common for pupils to use phones and tablets for leisure as a ‘networked’ activity - i.e. watching video and film on their devices, and using social apps on the same devices for sharing and commenting on films, videos and images using social media. Given that these activities are often concurrent and overlaid with one another, and that gaming is likely to be networked, the separation between social networking and interpersonal communication, and leisure uses and gaming is not easy to define or quantify.

5.1.3 How did young people view their balance between online and offline activity?

The following table gives data for four schools, since it was only these schools which responded to the survey with questions about balance. The most frequent response (mode) for each question about control and online/offline balance is given, showing the proportion of respondents giving this answer.

Table 7: Young people’s opinions of the balance between time spent on- and off-line

	School C	School D	School E	School F
View of time spent on digital devices	Bit more than I should 45%	Bit more than I should (29%)	Bit more than I should (40%)	Lot more than I should 56% (9 of 16 responses)
View of time spent on non-digital activity	Enough (41%)	Enough (44%)	Enough (45%)	Enough (55%) (5 of 16 responses)
View of balance between screen time and non-digital activity	Satisfied (38%)	Satisfied (36%)	Satisfied (28%)	Satisfied 55% (5 of 16 responses)
People miss out on discovery and developing other interests if they spend too much time on technologies	Agree/strongly agree (58%)	Agree/strongly agree (62%)	Agree/strongly agree (51%)	Agree 67% (11 of 16 responses)

NB School F is represented by as few as 16 students; the sample is so small that the responses of just one or two pupils can tip the balance, and therefore the slightly different pattern in this school is not necessarily an indication that pupils in this schools have opinions and experiences that diverge strongly from pupils in other schools.

A large segment of all the students who completed the survey felt that their time spent on devices was ‘a bit more than it should be’. The choice of this response suggests some sense of uneasiness or even guilt about time spent felt by a relatively large number of students overall. It is interesting that in two of the schools a higher proportion of respondents chose this option. The two schools have similarities in that both are located in suburban/small town settings, with a relatively large proportion of affluent families. School D, where a smaller segment of students expressed any uncertainty about their use, has a much more culturally and economically diverse demographic, with more ‘disadvantaged’ families. The data do not make possible any statistical correlation between parental negative or concerned attitudes to device use and young people’s feelings of unease, but students’ responses suggest this as a possibility.

Just under half of the sample in Schools C, D and E said they thought they undertook ‘enough’ offline activity. Yet fewer were ‘satisfied’ with the balance they had between online and offline activity. Responses agreeing with the more generalised statement about people ‘missing out if they spent too much time on technologies’ were much more frequent: over half the respondents in each school agreed or strongly agreed that this was the case.

5.1.4 What do young people think is ‘too much’ use?

In response to the survey question “What are the signs of too much use”, young people’s responses fell into three categories: health-related (eye strain, headaches, lack of sleep); social (‘keeping you waiting’ ‘always checking’ and ‘not listening’ in relation to smartphones and especially social media); obsessive or addictive behaviour (associated with gaming, or game-like challenges in social media such as keeping ‘streaks’ going). What is notable is that the descriptions the students offered were almost always applied to other people, not themselves.

When asked, in focus groups, for examples of people who use their devices too much, gaming came up as the activity that held their attention:

My brother; he’s always on his PS4 constantly every day and he doesn’t do his homework so basically my mum takes it off him to do his homework.

My brother too. He just sits upstairs and...plays on his computers.

The word ‘addictive’ was applied by the students to a range of activity: to game playing, to younger children’s use of iPads, to watching episodes of television, and, in relation to adults, continual use of their phones. Attaching the word to their own use was less frequent. The following contribution from five girls to a focus group discussion typifies what the young people we spoke to had to say about ‘too much’ phone use:

Girl 1: My mum’s always on her phone. And she – when she gets home from work, she’ll go on her phone then I’ll get home from school, she’ll still be on her phone or she’ll be watching telly and I hardly get to spend any time with my mum on weekdays. There’s like two days that I get to spend with my mum when she’s not on her phone.

Girl 2: Yeah. Like I’m always on my phone or I’m always on the internet or anything and it’s like I can’t help but not go on it and I don’t know why. My mum’s like that.

Girl 3: My mum sometimes, when we’re sat watching TV or something or eating dinner or something, she’ll constantly be on her phone and then when you’re talking to her she’ll just nod but she’s not really listening. It’s a bit annoying sometimes, especially when you tell her

something important and she's just nodding. I told her about ReConnect and she did listen and she does agree with it

Girl 4: My sister because she's got two children and she keeps going on her phone and normally I have to keep them entertained while she's on her phone.

Girl 5: My mum because when we're trying to eat or something she's on her phone and when we're outside she's on her phone.

The tendency to give examples of other people's continual or excessive use included younger children being 'addicted' to their iPads

Girl: My brother, my little brother, as soon as he wakes up on the morning, he's like, 'Mam where's iPad? Mam where's my iPad?' He's five. He just watches YouTube while he's eating his breakfast, when he's eating his dinner, he's watching YouTube. Mum just goes, 'Billy I'm going to turn your iPad off if you don't eat your dinner,' and she turns it off and puts it on the side.

Boy: My cousin's addicted to his iPad. He always wants to go on game consoles and stuff like that. I tell him to just go outside and all that and we'll play football or something like that, but he just wants to play on that.

The few examples in the data that described young people's own excessive use were of specific types of activities: watching episodes of television programmes and gaming. The following example of sacrificing sleep in favour of watching 'just another episode' comes from a conversation between girls in a focus group interview held before the ReConnect programme began at their school. It's noteworthy that what is compelling is not just the programme itself, but that the programme in question is embedded in their social world: one of the regular and keenly anticipated topics of conversation amongst their peer groups.

Girl 1: Because sometimes, people are, "Oh, I'll just watch one episode" or something, and then they keep watching it, and it's like, oh, I'll just sleep in in the morning, but then you can't.

Girl 2: Yeah, I do that sometimes. I guess it just makes it harder for you to sleep because then, say you're trying to limit your time, on it, you just want to know what's going to happen next in the episode, and then you struggle to sleep and it takes you ages, and then you'll have less sleep.

Girl 1: At first, it'll be like, what if I just watch one more episode?

Interviewer: Is it something that lots of your friends watch, as well, so you need to talk to them about it?

Girl 3: Yeah, catch up with whatever episode they're on.

Girl 2: Yeah, and then if they're going to be talking about it at school tomorrow and you're not on that episode, it's going to ruin it for you, so you think, oh, I need to watch this.

Girl 1: And then, you just become addicted to it and you watch one more and then another (laughing).

One boy spoke of an 'addictive' use of games, combining both third (they) second (you) and first (I) person usage in his detailed description:

Like you'd find a game that you really love and you just like get so stuck into it and you'd like think about it 24/7 and you'd think like, no, you'd say like, Super Mario Brothers or something then, I don't know what people play on, but they'd think, "Oh, it's such a great level, I really want to pass it," and then they have to come off the games, and then they think, "Oh, I really want to go on it," and that's how addictive it can be, that like there's nothing else they think of. They just – they don't think of going outside, playing with their mates, they

don't think about spending time with the family, they just think, "Ooh, I want to play that game and I want to pass that level".

I was quite addicted to my games, that's why the first time like I played with it at night, that's quite addictive for me to sneak out and go and get it, and once – the first time I did it I kept on doing it until I got caught and I would have kept on doing it if I didn't get caught.

Well ... it can be quite severe and it's like if you don't eat anything because you're like so enthusiastic to beat this level or something, and you just don't think about eating or drinking or staying hydrated, so you can get dizzy, your eyes can go square many people say, and ... yeah, you just feel like woozy and when you – because you're playing on it so long, and most people will, and then they come off it like straightaway, their eyes have to sort of like process the...

The survey responses offered as descriptions of 'too much' use of digital devices are interestingly congruent with general anxieties found, in the media and popular discourse, about the signs and effects of 'over use' of games and social media.

Both in the surveys and when discussing the notion of 'too much' in focus groups, the examples given tended to be of other people. This suggests, for some, a tendency to want to distance themselves from this phenomenon. However there were young people who used 'addictive' to describe their own behaviours. They were not unfamiliar with the feeling of 'needing to keep going', with a TV series of with levels of challenge in a game. They offered examples from their own personal experience and referred to social incentives such as 'being up to the same episode as my friends', 'getting to the next level of a game'. References to personal 'addiction' to phone use were much less evident in discussions of 'too much' though more evident when describing the behaviour of others, most frequently family members.

When discussing the fine detail of control over devices, the descriptions that young people gave of their experiences began to give a more nuanced picture of their own experience of drawing a line between 'too much' and 'enough' - at least in family contexts - as the next section will show.

5.1.5 Who controls young people's use of digital devices?

Data from the surveys provide a starting point for considering the topic of control.

Students were asked: does anyone control or restrict your digital activity?

Over a third of respondents said that no-one controlled or restricted their digital activity. More students referred to control 'sometimes' than 'regularly.' Where there was regular control, this was mostly by parents. Where control was exercised 'sometimes', this was divided almost equally between control by self and control by parents. Very few students referred to control being a joint/shared activity between them and parents.

5.1.6 Feeling in control

Asked to respond to the statement: *I feel in control of my digital devices*, nearly 80% of the whole sample agreed or strongly agreed. There was some variation between schools but the general trend was clear.

Students were invited to give reasons for their answer. The responses were grouped using rough typifications. Responses cited are examples.

Explanations that simply assert being in control, doing what you want, having the right to choose.

It's my choice

I come off it when I wanna and go on it when I wanna.

It's my phone so I go on it when I want

No-one can control what I do

I spend more time on line than I should because I want to.

Explanations based on being able to turn the device off or put it down; demonstrating self control, making a conscious choice.

If I don't want to use it I can just switch it off; no one is forcing me to go on it or off it.

I can leave my phone at home to go out with the family without worrying that I'm missing out on anything.

I can put it down and do something else instead.

I can easily put it down when told or when I tell myself.

I can stop myself/come off whenever I want.

I know when I should be doing something else than go on my device and I can do this with ease.

Explanations based on having a balance in use, or control related to time spent on the device.

I just make sure I never go over four hours. I limit myself to a certain time

I do all my homework/chores first then time myself for the amount of time I spend.

I often leave my phone behind if it's not necessary and spend time off the web reading.

I do a lot of sport and this balances my screen time.

Use it when I need for homework as well as my own social media purposes, which I think is a good balance.

I'm not constantly on. I have a balance between screen time and sports clubs.

Because I like the outdoor things I do with my family and I'm on my phone for a reasonable amount of time

Explanations based on having demonstrated control through a reduction in time spent, possibly during ReConnect.

I have spent a week without my phone and realised what different things there are.

I'm not on the internet as much as I was

I have reduced my hours

I hardly go online now I'm always out with my friends and family

I can go a full three days without being on my phone

I have reduced time on my phone and my tablet

Because I have decreased my time online

Explanations based on the absence of external control.

No-one tells me to come off it

My mam doesn't tell me how long I should spend on my phone so I do what I want

Nobody cares to control my time so it's all my choice

Explanations asserting a strong sense of self-control, not being addicted or showing signs of addiction.

I am a controlled being

It is never an addiction.

My device has no control over me.

Cos I'm not addicted. I know when to turn it off and stop and go down to my family for a bit.

I can go for ages with and without my phone without being upset or distressed.

I am responsible for how much time I spend on and off devices and I have to control that to make sure it doesn't create a problem.

The range of reasons offered provide useful insights into the relationships young people have with their devices, and of their ideas of what constitutes evidence to support feelings of control.

5.1.7 Feeling not in control

Explanations from survey respondents who said they did not feel in control of their devices were varied. The range of reasons offered included: adult applied constraints, social pressures of different kinds, honest admissions of personal weakness, difficulty of staving off boredom; requirement from teachers to use or not use a device.

I can get addicted to games really fast

I love it too much

It is addictive and hard to stop off my phone and minipad

I can go off I just don't want to

I didn't stop after it [the reduction] I just went straight back on the internet

I play a lot of games with friends and don't look at how much time I spend on my computer

I feel that my digital use has gotten to a point where it was challenging to turn off my phone and laptop and that I have become totally dependent on the internet.

Adults don't understand that phones are such a big part of young people's lives and they take our things away from us.

No, because of my dad.

I have lots of friends that call me and I don't like declining.

'Cos people always want to talk to you and you can't ignore them

Most of my friends are via social media.

I just need to know what's going on and need to be able to keep in contact with everyone.

What I consider normal [usage] others consider extreme.

If I have nothing to do then I will always reach for my tablet.

Occasionally I think just one more video or just five more minutes.

I have things taken off me if I misbehave

I'm hardly allowed to go on my devices anyway

My mum decides when I can go on my digital devices

My parents tell me if I'm on too much and ask me to put them down.

5.1.8 Who should control the use of smartphones and other technologies?

When asked this question in focus groups, the answers we received suggested that young people felt that it should be them, although they might need some help. They wanted to be autonomous, and this was justified by the feeling that self-determination is necessary for adult life.

I think we definitely need control, but we should be controlling it ourselves because when we're older, we're not going to have our parents telling us that –

I think it should be ourselves because we have to teach ourselves not to go on it and if people just keep telling us, we're just going to hear it and just stay on our phones whereas if we teach ourselves to do it, it's us – and then we'll remember just to say – it'll make us realise that I'm just sat on my bed doing absolutely nothing, just sat –

The girls in the following extract from a focus group discussion acknowledged the difficulty in switching off at night and the need to use strategies (rather than relying on simply deciding not to use it):

Girl 1: Well, I have to - I leave my phone to charge downstairs, I don't charge my phone in my room because I know I'd be on it all night. Just seeing a notification come up on your phone and seeing the light and being, "Oh, somebody's messaged me, I need to see what they've said".

Girl 2: My mum doesn't like me charging my phone in my room because she knows I'm going to be on it.

This boy was quite explicit about difficulties with stopping using the phone at night, and about the uncomfortable interplay between him and his mother over his use of the phone:

Peter: My Mum likes to take my phone now, in the evenings, like, when I'm going to bed, because, I, like, I'll wake up in the night, and I'll constantly be on it. Because, like, at night I always watch YouTube programmes in bed, I don't know why. I'll try to hide my phone because I'm addicted to it. Sometimes she will take my phone off me. And, like, even if I say, "No, you're not having it," she will, she'll, she'll keep watching me until I put it down, and then she'll come and take it.

Accounts of being fully independent in managing devices, were the exception. This girl, who comes from a family in which there is little use of technology, said:

I'm already, sort of, independent. Like, I know how long I'm spending on my phone. No, what I do, like, I see every text message I have, then I would leave my phone for quite a while, then, like, when I come back, I will answer, then I'll put it down and I leave it. I don't stay on the phone. I don't have it with me all the time; there's nothing, really, to do on it.

I go to my friend's house and stuff. I look after my little brother. I read sometimes. I listen to music a lot. I have a computer. Well it's my brother's and he let's me use it sometimes. It sort of, like, has a playlist, so, I just leave it to play when I'm out doing stuff in my room. I use it when I do, like, have to send emails to my teachers. I only have a phone.

It was more common for the young people we spoke to tell us about the variety of strategies that their parents put in place to control, or attempt to control the use of technology in the home. The descriptions that some young people gave us of these strategies indicated that parents themselves did not find it easy to restrict their own use, as the following examples show.

Harriet, who is in Year 8 at an all girl's school, told us that her mother tries to control the time she spends on screens when she is at home, but that her mother in fact uses her own phones at times when the family is together, a time which Harriet herself identifies as 'for socialising' and not for being on screens:

She'll just be telling me to get off my phone, even when she's on her phone, which I don't find right...but, you know. And she'll just like take my phone off me every now and again, 'You're using it too much.' Harriet lives with mum and stepdad in a 'very phone-based house'. In the evenings after dinner she will be in her room while the adults are 'downstairs, probably on their phones, watching telly.' She usually leaves her phone in her bedroom, never takes it downstairs, because 'if you're downstairs you should socialise more because family's downstairs mostly.' She thinks her mum uses her phone 'way too much'. 'She uses it when

eating and I'm like, no, we shouldn't be doing that. But I feel like I understand because I do it as well.'

Young people's descriptions of their experience of their parents' continual use of phones were sympathetic as well as expressing frustration; the experience of spending time with people who are communicating with non-present others, displacing possibilities for family contact, frustrates teenagers as well as parents. A boy told us:

Well, when I normally talk to my family, we're both normally on our phones, but when I'm not on my phone it's a lot easier, and it's frustrating when they're on their phone and I'm talking to them. That's what my Mum feels like all the time, and it's really frustrating. Because, like, I'm always on my phone when I come to get my tea. I'm always on my phone, and when she talks to me I'm always on my phone, and, like, the other day when I came downstairs and I wasn't on my phone, I go, 'Alright, Mum,' and she was just on her phone, and it takes, like, five minutes to respond, and that's what I'm like when I'm on my phone.'

Matthew, who is also in Year 8 and at a mixed school, lives with his parents and two siblings. They all have their own devices, which they use for leisure, work/school and communication. A clear delineation is made between 'online' time in the home and 'offline time':

Matthew has an Xbox, a laptop and a phone.

I mainly use my Xbox for games obviously, my laptop is usually for work and games and my phone I use mostly for calls but sometimes I watch YouTube on it and occasionally when I'm just waiting I play games on it.' He spends most time on online games with friends from school. My sister uses her Kindle just to watch like... she uses it to watch TV when my family are downstairs watching television...if she wants to watch something different... and she also uses it to play games I think. And my mum and my dad they use their laptop and the iPad to do work and just research stuff and then they use the TV. They use their phones just to keep in touch with people. My dad has two, he has one to keep in touch with his friends and one for work.

When the family are at home together, the parents perceive and implement controls, not only for the children but for the whole family:

My brother uses his Xbox. He did use his laptop and phone but they got taken away from him because he's doing his GCSEs at the moment, so they didn't want him to get distracted from work.

My dad he has this cap on the internet so we can't go on the internet past 8.30. The internet switches off handset devices like my sister's Kindle, the Xbox and my laptop and my phone and then it used to be my brother's iPhone and his stuff.

Matthew explained that thinks that's fine - and interestingly, the measures that his father takes are consistent with the control that he thinks he would take even if they weren't externally imposed: if it weren't switched off at 8.30 he thinks he'd probably just be finishing up around then. Offline activities in Matthew's home include reading and board games:

I sometimes play like board games with my family, I sometimes watch television with my family, sometimes I read books like on my... I've got a Kindle Fire and I've also got a load of like comics and books in my room and I've got a couple of games, like I've got a rubber band game and I've got like this marble set.

Regardless of the family cap on internet use, Matthew would be considered by some to be an avid user of technology. At weekends he spends 'probably about three to four hours, maybe five, and weekdays probably about eight to ten hours over five days' playing online games. On average that's about 2.5 hours a day. 'I would say that's sort of in between, middle ground.' Matthew says he spends about an hour a day on his phone.

Mostly I just watch YouTube when I'm like just not doing really much, I just watch YouTube or play games. I watch like top ten videos and sort of just occasional like miscellaneous videos. It's hard to put them into a category. I have a lot of recommended so they're mostly that.' He doesn't use social media much. 'I have Instagram but I really like never use that really much, I go on it maybe three times a month. There's not really much to do, like sometimes I use it to stay in touch with my friends that's mostly the reason I got it, like I don't really use it for much either so... I can't really have a very good opinion on it because I don't really use it that much... It's more like just sharing pictures and messages and videos, like it's not really much... I don't really look at them much. Sometimes, when I find it like funny, I just like the video altering.' Although Matthew doesn't use Instagram much he can describe exactly how the system works and how it can be used. 'I've posted about ten pictures but mainly they're just pictures of scenery, like I think I took a picture of the view from a cliff and I took a picture of this massive bridge in France, I've just taken pictures of scenery. I got about ten likes on them, not much. It's because I didn't really have that many followers. I follow my friends, I follow like Barcelona and a couple of like... I follow the FIFA Instagram page just to keep updated on the new news on it and that's mainly it, like I don't really follow anyone else.'

Matthew's comfort with the restrictions imposed by his father were reflected in the descriptions from other young people we interviewed, who described finding the controls on home use of technology implemented by parents as ultimately helpful and welcome, despite the tensions involved.

Jacob, describes how his mum got involved.

I was a bit cheeky, because I said that I wanted to go on it, but she was, like, "No, you need to come and spend time with me," and then at the end of the day I had to give it to her because I wouldn't.'

Sharelle told us:

We're not allowed us phones at the dinner table, because that's kind of a – you need to talk to your family then and that's the one area where if you're going to bring your phone, don't bring it there. I think at first, I was kind of a bit like not happy with it, but then I think now that I can – I talk to my parents a lot more and I talk with my family a lot more, it gets better.

Tracy My Mum doesn't like me being on my phone. She, like, lets me have, like, five minutes to do my streaks, and then I've got to be off it. And, people always say to me, why do you go to bed so early, it's not that, it's just my Mum takes my phone off me, because she thinks that I'll be on it too much. And, to be honest, I probably would be. I can, like, spend time with my family more, and do homework, as I said. And, when your phones there, and your homework's there, your homework's due in a few days, you think, "Oh, I'll go on my phone, I've got that, I can do that another time," and, you just, putting it back, because you've got your phone.

Adrian, who told us about his extensive use of PlayStation, was first given an iPad when he was 10:

I played games on it and I'd go on it for a long time because it were like new and I wanted to spend loads of time on it.

His mother tries to limit the time he spends on his PlayStation:

My mum says like because when it's like 9.30 sometimes I'm still playing on my PlayStation; and she tries to make me go outside and play. Sometimes I agree with her but sometimes I just ignore her.

However, he says control is a good thing

Because you've got to like control how many hours and how many... People go on it for like days and you've got to try and... you've got to basically reconnect with your family.

He thinks that having someone like his mum unplug or switch off devices would help.

I'd probably be angry at the time but then I'd forget about it and probably be alright with it. He doesn't think he would be able to unplug a device himself.

If I could I probably wouldn't.

Some young people told us that external control wasn't important or necessary. Here a group from one of the Focus Group compare experiences;

Bob: I'm usually quite responsible with technology use. So, like my parents don't really do much, but when it does get too much, they'll just like say something... Like they don't really need to like turn the Wi-Fi off because, like I know that like nine is a good time to stop and if I don't cut off like my devices, then like I won't sleep because I have trouble sleeping.

Evan: I consider myself similar to Bob. I've got quite a good self-control over how I use it, but previously when I didn't have that much self-control, I had a one-and-a-half-hour limit on my computer every night, and if I were to go over that, then my computer was connected to the internet via wide connection, so my mom would just take the wire out. That was when I was younger and now I've sort of adapted to that, so I'm more aware of those boundaries and I just don't cross them and if I do then obviously there's a punishment like shorter times going on or something like that.

Kyle: I do try to control myself but, sometimes, I do just get a bit carried away, So, kind of, sort of, I would sit there and I'd, kind of, forget time and I'd sit there and go, "Oh, it's only been half an hour or whatever." And really, it hasn't. But in my head, I think it is. And then my parents do have to remind me that I do need to stop at some point, and then I do. So, you know, I think I'm controlling myself with the time, but then, you know, other times, I can notice that I've been on it for quite a while and will stop myself. I'm usually quite good at tracking time when I'm on my games, but then sometimes, I just end up not caring any more.

Charlie: I'm, sort of, like, similar to Kyle. I, kind of, like, lose track of time, of how long I'm on my, like, game or phone for but, recently, I've been, like, more aware of, like, how long, what time it is and, like, how long I've been on, like, my game or phone for.

Tom: We should be in control. Like, when my parents do ... Well, when I'm not on my Playstation, it's not like there's anything else I could be doing. I'm normally up to date with my homework. It's not like I'm telling them that's not like there's anything else I could be doing. If I go down and watch the telly, what's the difference between gaming and watching the telly?

Tom's comment "it's not like there's anything else I could be doing" was reflected in the accounts of other young people, for whom 'finding something else to do' was one of the frustrations of having their internet access turned off

Shirley: My mum – my mum's got this app that she's connected her phone to my phone and she says – say I've got a test that day at school, she'll turn my apps off while I'm at school.

So, she makes sure I'll have to revise. Sometimes it really annoys me, sometimes say I've come in from school and I've done all my homework but I have nothing else to do-

Amy: Sometimes it's annoying if I'm in the middle of a conversation and then the apps just get turned off and then that's just annoying but now I think sometimes if my apps just get turned off I'll just deal with it and just read a book or something.

5.1.9 Summary and Discussion

The responses to a request, in the survey, for young people to estimate their time spent on digital devices each day showed that amongst the students at the six study schools there were small groups of very high users (8 hours or more) and of very low users (two hours or less). However, the responses of a majority of students fell between these extremes at between 3 and 6 hours. Overall most students' estimates fell below the threshold found in the Goldilocks study, at which wellbeing could be expected to decrease.

The ReConnect programme required students to log actual time spent on devices during the first week of the programme. The logging was done in several different ways and it was not possible to access these data sets from the schools. However, it is salient at this point to note that, in the one-to-one interviews and focus groups, students often spoke of difficulties in recording the time spent because of the nature of the many ways they interacted with their devices, from glancing at the time, posting or making a quick response to a message or image, checking arrangements or timings, to longer periods spent gaming, watching a film or following a vlog. Much of their activity was intermittent or networked with other digital activity.

To get a sense of what young people were using their digital devices for, the survey asked students to list their activities in order of frequency of use. The dominant activity across all schools was use of social media. Qualitative data indicate that Snapchat and Instagram (and to a lesser extent WhatsApp and Facebook), were the most frequently used apps for communication; this was mainly by phone but sometimes by tablet. Some students used Twitter. The use most often placed second, but sometimes first, was use of phones or tablets to access films, video, vlogs, generally via YouTube or Netflix. There were also students whose most frequent activity was gaming; many of these were also users of social media and consumers of digital media. In some schools internet-based study or information search was placed in the first three most frequent activities.

In relation to the concept of balance, it could be argued that responses to the survey and responses in interviews and focus groups suggest a certain degree of unease, anxiety or mixed feelings among many participants about time on devices. The figures suggested as 'the ideal time spent' were in general lower than those for estimated time spent. Between 30% and 45% of respondents thought that they spent a bit more time on devices than they should. Less than 50% thought they spent 'enough' time offline, though fewer were 'satisfied' with their balance. To confuse the picture even more, well over half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that 'people miss out on discovery or developing new interests if they spend too much time on technology.' This relative confusion in response may reflect the impact of received opinions about digital technologies and young people that are frequently featured in the media and the cause of parental concerns.

Students' ideas about signs of 'too much use' were also congruent with current anxieties in the media and popular discourse. Their suggestions were health-related or indicators of social

detachment or obsessive and addictive behaviours, especially with reference to gaming. Interestingly, the descriptions offered were almost invariably applied to 'other people' often family members.

Asked if they felt in control of their device use 80% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Reasons for feeling in control or not in control offered in explanation of this response provide evidence for attitudes to control and insights into students' relationships with their devices. As well as careful accounts of self-management there were simple assertions (it's my choice); references to ownership (because it's mine) and indications of the triumph of 'want to' over 'need to'.

When discussing who should be in control most students thought it should be their responsibility. Many wanted autonomy and some were looking ahead to adult life. However most acknowledged that at this stage they needed help and welcomed family intervention, even though some found this annoying and it had made them angry. Strategies devised by students and families were most often connected with avoiding device use after a certain time in the evening, or to ban devices when families were gathered for a meal or other event. The family context and personal histories of device ownership were relevant to patterns of use and attitudes to control. Some students had their first smartphone in primary schools; most were acquired on transition to secondary school. Access to an Xbox or Play Station for confirmed gamers usually started in primary school.

6 The ReConnect Programme in Schools

6.1 Six Diverse Schools

School	Area served		Specialism, if any	Number of pupils	Age Range	Number of pupils who participated in ReConnect in 2017
A	Town and surrounding area	Single Sex (girls)		837	11 to 18	213
B	Inner City	Mixed (but 80% boys)	Creative Media, Gaming and Digital Technology	304	14 to 19	99
C	Town and surrounding area (Wales)	Mixed		1000	11 to 18	163
D	Town and surrounding area	Mixed	Science	1462	11 to 18	235
E	Fringe of large city	Mixed		1789	11 to 18	300
F	Inner City	Mixed	Business and Enterprise; Sport	1330	11 to 19	30

School A is a selective, all-girls grammar school, serving a town of population 70,000 and a surrounding rural area.

School B opened in September 2013 and provides specialist education in gaming and digital media education, and is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school and caters for students in the 14–19 age range. Almost half the students are eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional government funding for children looked after by the local authority, from forces families and for students known to be eligible for free school meals).

School C is an 11 to 18 mixed comprehensive school in Wales, serving a town of population 14,000 and the surrounding area. Around 10% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Very few pupils receive support to learn English as an additional language and very few pupils come from an ethnic minority background. None of the learners speak Welsh as a first language or to an equivalent standard.

School D is much larger than the average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average. The percentage of students for whom English is an additional language is much lower than the national average, as is the figure for students from minority ethnic families.

School E is a Community College significantly larger than the average secondary school and has a large sixth form. It serves a cluster of towns and villages with a combined population of around 25,000. Fifteen per cent of students are supported by the pupil premium and the percentage of students for whom English is an additional language is much lower than the national average. This is also the case for the figure for students from minority ethnic families.

School F is an average-sized secondary school in an inner-city location with specialisms in business and enterprise, and sport. Just under half the students are of White British heritage, with many other ethnic groups represented, including significant proportions of African and Caribbean heritage. A well-above-average proportion of students have a first language other than English, though few are at the early stages of learning English. One third of students are entitled to free school meals.

In total, 1040 students were involved in the programme.

6.1.1 The Delivery of the Programme in the six schools

For each school, we report how the ReConnect programme was fitted into the curriculum and the timetable, and also the reasons given for undertaking the programme

School A

‘Students inhabit a digital world we don’t live in and don’t always understand. We can talk to them but we will never live it as they do.’ (Head Teacher)

Delivery of ReConnect

The ReConnect programme was delivered by Form Tutors in Form Tutor time (25 minutes) twice a week over five weeks. This required a shortened version of the Scheme of Work, produced by the ReConnect team in collaboration with the programme lead in the school. Form tutor time was chosen in order to place ReConnect outside the assessed school curriculum. It was felt that locating the programme there could make it more personal, different from the way students learn in other lessons. Also it was hoped that students’ long-standing relationships with their form tutors would facilitate more open and authentic engagement. Form Tutors are not allocated any preparation time for this role so the programme lead (who was not a Form Tutor) undertook all related preparation and administration. Teachers were provided with materials and plans for each session, in advance.

Seven Form Tutors were involved in the research; three in Year 8 and four in 9. The fourth group in Year 8 was taken by a supply teacher and so excluded from the research at the request of the school.

The programme was situated in Years 8 and 9 because the school saw it as a peak time for issues with digital devices; these ‘peter out after Year 10.’

Background and reasons for undertaking ReConnect

School A’s reasons for introducing Re-Connect included:

- The programme related to school development priorities: A ‘Bring Your Own Device’ Policy, and a whole-school focus on students developing a ‘growth mindset/resilience’.
- The school saw ReConnect as part of the response to challenging issues related to social media use. Teachers and parents were also concerned about the amount of time

students spent on phones. The focus was on ‘responsible use’ and ‘empowerment’ It was felt that Year 8 and 9 needed this most.

The programme was managed and administered by a teacher who was not a Form Tutor and so not involved in delivering the programme.

A member of the Senior Leadership Team had oversight of the programme.

The Head Teacher supported the introduction of the programme.

School B

‘There is much to be understood about online activity: the ability to hide from emotional engagement; people’s fragmented use of social media – managing different identities and different audiences. Most of the students are in some ways highly skilled and sophisticated at all this but may not have reflected on what they are doing.’ (Principal)

‘It’s not about rejecting the digital world – it’s about necessary use versus elective use. There’s a good distinction to be made between having to and choosing to which maybe should be stronger in the scheme.’ (Principal)

Delivery of ReConnect

This was the second time that School B had run the ReConnect Programme. The Principal, has been interested in and supportive of ReConnect from the start. As in the first run, he took responsibility for leading the programme, deciding on content, emphasis, process and briefing teachers for a collaborative activity.

The programme launched in March and was fitted into five weeks, with the disconnect activity located in the last week of the term. It was delivered weekly in 90 minutes sessions. All Year 10 and 9 students gathered as for an Assembly and sat at circular tables of between 12-15 students. The Assembly was led by The Principal. He introduced the main theme for each session and then students took part in workshop-style tasks in their table groups supported by four Coaches (Form Tutors) and the Principal, who circulated and facilitated.

Background and reasons for undertaking ReConnect

For the second run of ReConnect the school wanted to embed it more clearly in the curriculum. The programme aims and content were matched against the overarching themes and frameworks for the Year. Theme1: What is the Best Use of Technology? Theme 2: How do I become a digital leader. The programme was seen to contribute to and be symbiotic with theme 2. The Digital Leadership theme is timetabled and pursued in different lesson contexts. It covers ‘entrepreneurship and employability’ which includes dispositions as well as a knowledge base, ethical stances in relation to all aspects of commercial activity, critical thinking. It was hoped that ideas raised in ReConnect sessions would be taken up where Digital Leadership was a focus, and vice-versa. ReConnect was also woven into the oracy framework, a new focus, which the school is prioritising.

Because the ReConnect material is so stimulating it was just a question of thinking how best it would fit into the Assembly and workshop scenario.

Reasons for undertaking the ReConnect programme were also linked with the school’s interest in the relationship between students having control, resilience, self-efficacy and their academic achievement. Some students at School B, it was felt, had not learned self-denial and skills of deferred gratification.

They know they should be in control but they can’t always achieve it. Some parents are active, especially when they are younger, but most give up or don’t bother.

School policy is tolerant of phones up to a point. Students are allowed to listen to music on phones if engaged in extensive pieces of work. Phones are confiscated for inappropriate use, including lateness. This is recognised as perhaps not consistent with developing attitudes to behaviour and balance: 'It is extremely effective but sits oddly beside us encouraging them to give it up voluntarily.' Cyberbullying is 'not the norm'. If anything comes to light the school takes action very quickly. The students are quite open and feel comfortable to talk to a teacher if there is a problem or concern: 'They know we act.'

School C

'It's important to reinforce the idea of balance regularly and also the idea of living in the present – not just recording it.' (Teacher)

Delivery of ReConnect

The ReConnect programme in School C was located in the Humanities Curriculum for Year 8 students. Students in Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9) have three one-hour lessons a week on Humanities, in mixed ability classes. The programme ran for two weeks in May/June with six groups. For most groups there was a one-week holiday between Week 1 and Week 2; the 'disconnect' activity was set in that time. Groups who started early had the 'disconnect' activity in the last week of term. Of the six groups three were taught by trainee teachers on a PGCE course. One teacher who had recently returned from long-term sick leave was on a temporary contract. Some sessions were covered by a supply teacher.

The Lead Teacher for the ReConnect Project did not teach a Year 8 group.

Background and reasons for introducing ReConnect

The Head Teacher provided the original impetus for introducing ReConnect in the school. She saw a ReConnect tweet, thought it looked like a great project and responded. After discussion with the ReConnect team School C joined the research project. The Head Teacher was interested in the overall focus on awareness and balance. She liked the emphasis on 'understanding the risks and benefits of being online', on the idea that 'apps can be addictive and are designed to be like that', on looking at 'what else you can do.' The school has had experience of internet-related incidents and issues. These are all dealt with promptly and where possible with a 'no shame, no blame approach which supports learning.' Relationships with parents about this are good.

There had been school-wide Continuing Professional Development training on the Digital Competency Framework and the school was encouraging the use of technology in lessons but not via students' own devices. The school has a 'Bring Your Own Device' policy but phones/tablets must be in school bags in lessons. Teachers may allow students to use their phones to photograph a board or use their electronic planners. Use of digital devices at break or lunch-time is impossible to monitor and so is ignored. All teachers have a 'work Twitter Account' which GCSE and post-16 students can access. Staff-student digital communication is encouraged with older students.

The decision to locate the ReConnect programme in Humanities was done to make a statement about its importance. 'We wanted to give it a try in curriculum time, in regular lessons.' Year 8 was chosen 'because they are a prime target age-group, becoming more visible on social media. Social media and online activity is increasing rapidly; there are huge benefits and also risks. 'School philosophy is to 'embrace the online world' not try to ignore it as some schools do. The school's aim is to ensure young people's safety, and to teach

responsible use. The school has a website, is on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The idea is to demonstrate that ‘this is normal but this is how to use it responsibly.’

The Head gave responsibility for leading the ReConnect initiative to an experienced teacher who had been responsible for curriculum development in Humanities.

The Lead Teacher did not deliver the programme.

School D

Delivery of ReConnect

The ReConnect programme at School D was located in the IT curriculum for Year 8 students. The Head was aware that this would require an approach that was different from how most IT modules are delivered; but he thought it was sometimes useful and productive to upset students’ expectations about content and process. IT was not an inappropriate place to get students to be more critical. The teacher with responsibility for new technologies was asked to lead the programme and there was consultation with the Head of ICT, who was very supportive. Timing of the programme was carefully considered in relation to the timing of pledge week. The programme ran from late March for six weeks, including ‘disconnect week’.

There were seven mixed ability groups. Three groups were taught by the ReConnect lead teacher. Students were taught in ICT rooms. In addition to the declared aims of ReConnect, the programme at School D was linked with a move to develop students’ oral communication skills and their ability to work collaboratively. The agreed aim of the project was: to improve students’ digital balance and their confidence and oracy skills in collaborating with each other.

Background and reasons for introducing ReConnect

The Head Teacher was the instigator of the link with Re-Connect. He saw an article in the TES and contacted the project. His motivation was grounded in his concerns about the amount of time young people and adults spend online. ‘It disturbs me when I’m out to see people looking at screens and not at each other. When I’m out I want to eat my meal, not take a photo of it. There’s a place for technology but not to the exclusion of other things. I suppose that makes me old school.’ For him digital technology is a tool he uses when he needs it.

He is also concerned about the damaging effect on young people of ‘living their lives vicariously, 24/7 via tablets and technology.’ He thinks ‘social media is a damaging phenomenon.’ Most falling out among students, he thinks, is caused by social media platforms – facebook, twitter. It ‘puts kids under a microscope. Everything is ideal; people putting their magnificent lives online... It’s not a cause of mental health issues but it is an exacerbating factor.’

There have been examples of cyberbullying and sexting in School D, even in Year 7. The Head is also aware of research that links poor sleep patterns with cognitive damage. He thinks sleep-deprived students don’t think as clearly. He had seen the ReConnect Scheme of Work, though, he said, it was the aim of the project that he bought into rather than the content of the Scheme of Work. He thought that Re-Connect would engage the students and help them to evaluate their own use. He hoped ReConnect would encourage the students to

(re)consider their reliance on devices and that ‘life doesn’t end if they reduce the time spent on them’.

School Policy is that students can have phones with them for an emergency. In school, phones cannot be seen, cannot be on and cannot be used at any time. If they are seen by a member of staff at break or lunch time or between lessons, they are confiscated. They can be used in some lessons at the discretion of the teacher. The school has a learning platform which enables information exchange, setting, submitting and returning work. Some teachers are becoming interested in the potential of mobile technology in learning. The school is moving to increasing ‘Bring Your Own Device’ use in teaching and learning across all year groups. Initially this is most evident in Year 10 and post-16.

The teacher given the responsibility for introducing ReConnect into the curriculum. was seen as ‘the natural leader’ for the project. She delivered the programme to three groups.

School E

‘It’s their social life. They don’t see online and offline as different. There is not the same divide between the online world and the real world as some adults think.’ (Teacher)

‘With any development in technology ...you can’t stop it. All you can learn is to shift in relation to it...move with the technology. I worry if sometimes people focus too much on the negative. There’s no point in blaming the technology...you have to deal with it. School is a place to learn..to learn how.’ (Teacher)

Delivery of ReConnect

ReConnect in School E was located in the PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic) curriculum for Year 9. The school has a two-week timetable and PSHE lessons occur once in every cycle. Lessons last one hour and are taught by staff from a range of subjects, including music, drama, computing. Teachers included Heads and Deputy Heads of Guilds (Houses), an Assistant Principal, Head of Arts as well as class teachers. The programme started in early May and ran until the end of the school year in July.

There is no element of assessment in PSHE; it is designed to be a way to engage with students. This gives teachers freedom but also means that students may be less inclined to take it seriously and be harder to engage.

The Head of PSHE for 9 was on maternity leave during the year. The teacher who was covering the planning of PSHE and 9, and who introduced ReConnect to the school, undertook all preparatory work for the programme.

Background and reasons for introducing ReConnect

The teacher undertaking responsibility for PSHE in 9 during a colleague’s maternity leave brought the idea of ReConnect to the PSHE briefing group in school in March. He had heard about it at a PSHE Network meeting and thought it was ‘something fresh in PSHE and relevant to the students.’ It also fitted with a Mental Health theme in 9, one of five themes covered in the year.

The Deputy Principal with oversight of PSHE and the other Deputy Heads of Guilds (Houses) looked at the programme and approved it. They decided it would work well in 9.

The school has experience of online-related issues including cyberbullying and sexting. There is a strong e-safety message in all school activity; there are talks from police for Y7

and Year 8; but the feeling is that there is also a need for ReConnect type material. The Deputy Principal's view was that 'we should be empowering people to use technology sensibly...harnessing the advantages. It is not productive to come between the child and the device. We should help them to reduce time on devices by making sure there are other things to do.' Senior teachers were also interested in the fact that the programme dealt with 'use of social media, responsible use, legalities.' They hoped it would also cover 'courteous, effective use.'

School policy on digital devices has been through various iterations and developments. The current protocol is that phones are allowed in school but must not be on or out in lessons unless the teacher has given permission for specific purposes. Students can use phones at break and lunchtime. Phone-related factors are included in the Behavioural Policy and Expectations and transgressions dealt with in line with the behaviour management policy. The strategy is not to make a special case of phone-related behaviours.

The Academy has a Facebook page and a website. The Bulletin/Newsletter are available electronically as are other forms of school-related information. Information throughout each day is distributed to the very large staff by email. All students and staff have access to the school network/shared drive from any location. Electronic contacts between students and staff are more evident on post-16 courses.

School F

'Some of what we were trying to show them – they didn't agree with it. Some felt they weren't addicted. They had a different take on the role that phones and social media had in their lives. ReConnect and me were coming from a place which was critical of social media, a problem. They were saying 'It's not a problem.' (Teacher)

'It would be more effective to come from a more open exploratory place. We wanted them to agree with us. They never would.' (Teacher)

Delivery of ReConnect

Although School F was interested in using the ReConnect programme it proved impossible to accommodate it in the curriculum. 'It was not practical. Everything was already time-tabled. Every minute is precious to someone. We don't have an hour for PSHE. It didn't fit neatly.'

However, with one of the ReConnect team as a volunteer tutor, it became possible to fit ReConnect into a programme of extra-curricular workshops. These happened once a week for six weeks and lasted an hour. The Head of Learning for 9, chose 30 students for whom she felt the programme was particularly relevant. 'All had been involved in some sort of social media issue at some time.' They were students their teachers felt most liked to be challenged, and who were lively and talkative.

During the programme some students dropped out and were replaced by others keen to be involved. At the end of the programme there were 23 students in the workshop.

Background, Views and Attitudes of Teachers involved in delivering the ReConnect Scheme of Work

All teachers spoken to and completing the teacher questionnaire welcomed the introduction of ReConnect; they were keen to 'encourage students to think', to learn to relate socially offline as well as online; they hoped to 'raise awareness' and wanted students to 'be empowered'.

Teachers held different opinions about the possible adverse impact of technology on education/learning. Similarly their views about whether adults worried too much about social media and time spent on screens were varied. Nevertheless all teachers involved in the research identified a very large number of concerns related to screen use, social media and time spent online by their students.

One widespread concern was the effect of social media use and gaming on mental and physical health and wellbeing, in particular on sleep, lack of outside activity, and on girls' self confidence and attitudes to self image. The decline, or potential decline, of 'communication skills' as result of less face-to-face communication was another general worry. Respondents from all schools in the study, provided examples from their own or the school's experience, of cyberbullying, sexting and other forms of abuse. One teacher thought:

'A lot of young people can ignore it, or deal with it. Some are worried, too afraid to reveal it. You can deal with in-school things but lots take place outside – so you can't cope with all the issues.'

Some teachers characterised the attitudes and behaviour of some young people in relation to screen-based devices as 'addiction' and referred to 'a disconnect from reality.'

There was also some concern that device-use behaviours and social network issues were having an adverse effect on learning and were 'leaking' into classrooms/lessons. Teachers in schools with a 'Bring Your Own Device' policy spoke of having to manage students who seemed to think it appropriate to text or message in class. One teacher in a highly technology-based school described students whose first action in a lesson was to log on to their personal online accounts: 'They think they can check their Instagram status, log on to social media or YouTube. It's almost an addiction – 70% of the class have a real issue with this.' He had made a point of discussing 'appropriate behaviour' and 'professional behaviour' with them. This was not something they had considered:

'There is not the same divide between the online world and the real world as some adults think.'

Teachers involved in the ReConnect project also differed in their descriptions of themselves as users of digital devices, professionally and personally. Many worked in schools where management relied heavily on digital networks and communication to get things done. In one school, teachers were expected to be alert to email messages throughout the day and out of school. Schools had Twitter accounts, Facebook pages, educational networks/platforms or VLEs, communicated with parents online and by text. Many teachers made regular use of online sources (blogs, networks, groups) for information about education and their subject teaching.

Teachers reports of their use of devices for personal reasons, beyond what was minimally required by their job, were hugely varied. At one end of the spectrum was a teacher who saw screen based technologies as getting in the way of the 'here and now':

My screen time is much, much less than typical. Screens do not dominate my day or my activities. I insist on living my life in the here and now as much as I can.

This teacher thought ReConnect was urgently needed, echoing the discourse that often flares up in the media:

there's a potential mental health iceberg ahead if we don't show young people how to manage digital devices and the online world so that it's their servant and not their master.

It was more characteristic for teachers to describe themselves as regular and extensive users of digital technologies, giving a variety of reasons such as communicating with family and friends, organising and planning, getting information, gaming, shopping, accessing film and TV. Most thought they had achieved a balance and provided accounts of ‘balancing’ activity, also remarking on the behaviour and practices of family members and friends, as examples of ‘being out of balance’. We also met teachers who described themselves as heavy users of digital technologies; they also talked about balance, but were unsure whether they had their own use ‘in balance’.

Teachers’ ideas about the extent and levels of students’ use were gained from observation, anecdote, speculation and assumption. They had little information, if any, about what digital devices students owned, or what they had access to. No schools had undertaken any kind of audit to gain this information, and none of the schools had any clear evidence of what students were using digital devices for or how much time they were spending using them. For example one teacher had no idea that her form had created a What’s App Group which everyone in the class had been invited to join.

There was a comparable situation with regard to schools’ knowledge about parents’ views on their children’s use of digital technologies. It was not uncommon for parents to raise issues about pupils’ device use and online activity and for there to be parents within the school community who were active in expressing ‘concerns’, but for there to be very limited information about the frequency of the perceived problem within the school. In the same vein, information about the approaches and attitudes of families to their children’s use of devices was not systematically collected. Communication about perceived problems and potential problems between schools and families that involved digital technologies appeared to be incidental, for example in response to specific cases that provoked anxiety. There was no evidence of widespread discussion about perceived problems with technology across the whole school community, or means by which parents, pupils and teachers could develop shared understandings of what constituted ‘problematic’ or ‘appropriate’ use.

There was a pattern across all our interviews that teachers saw parents as falling into two different categories; some exercised varying kinds of control over device use by their children in the form of physical control (turning off wi-fi) or family rules (no phones at meals, or in bedrooms); others did not intervene at all. Teachers’ perceptions were that parents were more closely involved with monitoring their children’s use during the earlier years of secondary school, and that there were fewer interventions or controls when children were older (years 8 or 9). Schools indicated that they had had positive feedback from some parents about the introduction of ReConnect.

6.2 The ReConnect programme in practice

6.2.1 Before the programme started

The extent to which Lead Teachers worked on the Scheme of Work before the start of the programme varied between schools. ReConnect envisages its programme as fitting into PSHE. As was explained above, the six study schools integrated it into the school in ways that they found appropriate, and the diversity of ways in which this was done ranged from including it in workshop activity, for specific pupils who were thought might benefit, to holding it in an assembly for all Y9 and Y10 students, with their group tutors, with an additional aim to support pupils to develop critical thinking.

In **School A** the Lead Teacher worked with the ReConnect Team to produce a shortened version of the Scheme of Work that would fit into sessions lasting 25 minutes, rather than an hour. The sessions ran in form tutor time, rather than during PSHE lessons.

The Lead Teacher in **School B** was already familiar with the Scheme of Work and relaxed about adapting it as necessary and including his own material.

The Lead Teacher in **School C** thought that ReConnect was ‘not a natural fit’ with the Humanities scheme as it stood, but she saw the relevance of the programme and thought it could be made to work. She noticed a swear word in one of the resources which had to be dealt with. The layout and structure of the Scheme of Work was ‘not usual’. There were no Learning Objectives so these had to be added:

It is part of our daily routines. The students write down the Learning Objectives and there is a starter activity

The ways in which the ReConnect materials and resources were prepared and made available, and teachers were briefed on the programme, differed between schools.

In **School D** the Scheme of Work and the resources were reviewed to assess how they might fit into an ICT module, and approved. Given the additional aim of developing oracy skills and collaborative teamwork the Lead Teacher made changes to the Scheme of Work, building in more opportunities and time for debate to allow for the development of oracy skills and for team activity. She introduced a poster-making session as she felt students would be more confident producing a group poster than making a video. There were some formatting issues to enable the material could be seen on screens in classes and some technical issues about access which had to be sorted.

In **School E** the ten PSHE teachers were all emailed information about the school’s involvement in the programme and the research. The Scheme of Work and all the resources were circulated to them. There was no additional guidance or briefing. ‘It’s the same with any PSHE scheme – the lesson plans are delivered to the teachers. And the teachers get on with it as they think best for their groups.’

In **School C** there was one after-school meeting of teachers to go through the Scheme of Work and the resources. It was agreed that teachers would make their own decisions about using the Red, Amber or Green activities, because ‘they know their students.’

These brief descriptions, taken from our interviews with school staff as well as from information gathered in the course of visiting the schools, give a flavour of the very different ways in which the programme was approached in the study schools.

Teachers’ Impressions and Expectations

In some schools, teachers told us what they felt and/or predicted about the programme:

In **School B** one teacher said he had been introduced to the resources and was familiar with them from the previous year. Another teacher, new to the project, felt she had been ‘thrown in at the deep end.’ Both teachers were happy to follow in directions set by the Principal who was leading the programme.

In general all the teachers' first impressions of the Scheme of Work were positive: they agreed that the materials were well-pitched, easy to follow, and had an up-to-date feel. They liked the powerpoints and the videos.

Teachers in **School C** thought that condensing the programme into two weeks could mean that it had greater impact; doing it in a short space of time might encourage a lot of talk and discussion.

Some pre-programme comments were common to all or several schools:

- All lessons had the same format and lots of work was discussion based which was different from usual school practice. Some teachers were concerned that little work (evidence) would be produced.
- Teachers were concerned that they might not have enough time to prepare or enough time to deliver all the suggested content.
- There were concerns about the take home tasks.
- Some teachers thought they would need to create more opportunities for students to ask questions
- Some teachers were doubtful that some of the activities would succeed.
- Some teachers, were not sure about the approach and how it would be perceived by the students. The declared intention was not to be judgemental but the resources assigned in the first session had clear anti-technology messages.

Teachers views on the probable take-up for disconnect week, were varied.

One teacher predicted: 'those who have engaged with it will be up for disconnect...most wont do it.'

6.2.2 During the programme

Teachers' views of student response

Overall teachers reported that many students were willing to engage with the material and to discuss the ideas and issues raised. *'Students got involved, spoke directly and confidently, they were fierce and thoughtful.'* (School B) *'From the first session the students in my groups were really engaged and positive'*. (School D) *'The group was very vocal...much livelier than usual here. They liked that they were 'special' and out of other lessons.'* (School F) *'The students were open-minded and really sensible in these discussions; they respected each other's opinions.'* (School D)

However the data gathered from teachers indicate that student response was varied within and between groups in the same school. Some students exhibited resistance to being challenged, and denied that there was a problem. Of these some engaged in discussions, some were disruptive, some refused to engage. Where students perceived ReConnect to be judgemental and aimed at 'stopping us using our phones' teachers had to work hard to change their view. Some teachers felt that the approach could be more open and that the resources/discussion topics should include the positives of digital technologies and internet use. There was a lack of 'balance' in the programme. The success of the programme generally reflected the teachers' skill in mediating between it and the students. Some less successful groups were taught by trainee teachers, by cover teachers, by teachers less experienced in handling a

discussion-based approach to learning, or by teachers with little experience of the digital world and grave concerns about young people's behaviour in it.

Pledge Week/Disconnect Week

Take-up of the challenge to reduce screen time appeared to be very varied between schools and between groups within schools. There appeared to have been no organised collection of what had been pledged by whom, and schools were not able to supply detailed information about outcomes from the pledges. In some groups in School A teachers knew that take-up had been very low; School B had sufficient information to be able to state that around 60% of students undertook 'something'; 20% were committed to something more substantial and 20% did not participate. *'Most took a lot of persuading, and convincing to disconnect. It scared them'*. A few students in this school surrendered their phones for five days, those who were successful were awarded hot chocolate and a cake in the school canteen. In general, in all schools those who rejected the challenge were relatively heavy users of digital devices, with high dependence on social media.

In School D the Lead Teacher had wanted all the staff of the school to get involved and sign a pledge. The Head was positive about this idea. There was a sign up sheet and many got involved. Easter eggs were offered as an incentive to students and staff. The Lead Teacher provided a poster of ideas for different pledges. Some groups wrote their own pledges and signed up for what they agreed to do.

In this school, in the Lead Teacher's groups there wasn't much resistance:

maybe three or four didn't want to be involved.

In another teacher's group:

Some didn't really take it on board. About 50% engaged. I could have told you before who it would be.

Common examples of pledges were: giving up phones at meals; stopping an hour earlier to get better sleeping patterns, not using phones in break or lunchtime at school. Several teachers made a point of sharing with students how they and their family members used digital devices and many made a pledge to reduce their device use in some way. Some did not succeed.

Teachers' experience

Not unexpectedly, given the different ways the programme was being delivered, teachers' experiences were varied. However there were some aspects of the programme that were common to all.

Teachers often felt pressured for time. This was the case in School A, where ReConnect was run in 25 minute Form Tutor lessons; but pressure on time was also felt in School C, where ReConnect was included in Humanities lessons:

Often there was too much to fit into an hour. Not all lessons were completed within an hour but with three lessons a week it could run over into the next lesson.

In School F teachers thought

There was too much material for an hour...mostly because of the nature of the students: they wanted to say their piece and be heard.

All teachers felt they needed to be selective about how they delivered the Scheme of Work and what activities and resources they included.

In School B the Scheme of Work was used

as an anchor...we probably covered 80% of the sessions but not in as much detail.

The Lead Teacher changed some things, merged others, selected aspects for focus, left others out, added his own material. The idea was to find things that spoke directly to the students and would provoke debate and discussion.

Some teachers felt the programme needed more 'structure' and 'things for students to do'. Lessons generally followed the same pattern: view a resource/take-in information and then discuss. Teachers felt they needed to vary this to keep students focussed and on task.

Take Home Tasks

The Take Home Tasks presented many teachers with a dilemma. Attitudes to and policy for homework varied between schools. In Schools A and E, homework is never given for Form Tutor time or PSHE, where ReConnect was located.

Setting homework tasks is difficult. There are no sanctions if it is undone, so if something is important or must be done teachers will do it in a lesson. *(School E)*

However the Scheme of Work relies on homework tasks to inform the next lesson. Teachers in these schools took different approaches to setting homework tasks. Some were firm and followed up; some did not require students to do the tasks.

In School C, where the ReConnect programme was concentrated into three weeks,

there was little time between lessons for homework tasks and the take home tasks were not set

Views on Resources and Activities

There was a noticeable agreement about the most successful activities across all schools. The Design an App activity was used, liked and approved by all:

Students really enjoyed the creative side, and the process of making presentations and voting for the best. *(School D)*

Students responded well. They are familiar with social media apps and were interested to think about target audiences, issues around anonymity, e-safety, identity, mental health. *(School B)*

It was creative; but there was not a lot of time and they didn't complete it. But the weight was in thinking what is unique, what makes social media popular. *(School E)*

During that workshop they were very engaged. Came up with a lot of new, original ideas. The activity led to good discussions about anonymity online; it linked with an e-safety module so they could apply that and it reinforced it. *(School B)*

It was seen as very effective in prompting discussion and debate in all schools especially about anonymity, e-safety, and manipulation. Only in School F was it seen as 'confusing' and there the activity was changed to reviewing an existing app. This still provoked discussion of the same issues.

Logging time spent on devices was most effective in '*making students think about their behaviour*' This was a Take Home Activity but seen as important by most teachers who found ways of enabling it to happen. Many students did it as a pencil and paper activity, with varying persistence and success. Some students downloaded apps recommended by ReConnect some of which did not work. Some students found their own apps.

The Crossing the Line activity had to be adapted in all schools (except School B) because of lack of space: a standard classroom or (even worse) a computer suite does not provide the right space for it. Some teachers transposed the activity to paper to enable a visual record; some used a 'stand up/sit down' approach. Results sparked interesting discussion and responses between students; though some teachers wondered if some students were exaggerating their reported behaviour to impress or shock.

Some activities worked less well. In particular the Pie Chart/Pizza activity proved difficult for many and did not produce a good basis for discussion.

The most effective resources were 'provocative and have shock value' The Pokemon Go video, and the Chinese Boot Camp video provoked good discussion. '*The Chinese Boot Camp video triggered a lot of discussion. They considered: Is this addiction or just a habit? It divided the room.*' (School B).

The rap in the opening sessions was considered not a good choice by some teachers: 'it's generic content...they are used to that...seen it already.' 'Students are constantly on YouTube, some even have their own channels.' The video of past students making pledges 'didn't connect with everyone'.

Rights and responsibilities was seen as reiterating content already covered in the e-safety curriculum.

Support for teachers

This again varied between schools. It is important to recognise the difference between the PSHE teachers, the Form Tutors, the subject teachers in Humanities and IT and the 'Coaches' in the Principal-led programme in School B.

In schools in this research where ReConnect was linked with PSHE, teachers were not specialists: they were specialist teachers in other subjects who had volunteered or were required to take on this role. In School A Form Tutors, who were also subject teachers, saw students every day and had been with them since their entry into school. In School E the teachers who taught PSHE saw students for one hour every fortnight. In neither school were these teachers allocated preparation time for Form Tutoring or PSHE.

In School A teachers felt well supported by the programme leader/administrator. Materials were available, technical issues were dealt with, problems were solved, regular email contact was maintained. There were no opportunities to share experiences of delivering the programme, except informally. In School E all teachers were provided with the Scheme of Work and resources and expected to get on with it.

In School C, after the initial briefing session, Humanities Teachers also got on with it. The Lead Teacher, who was not delivering the programme, said: *If I don't hear anything I assume it was OK.*

In School D where the programme ran in the ICT curriculum, ReConnect was on the agenda for the weekly departmental discussion group. Teachers, especially trainees, were supported; problems were dealt with; the Scheme of Work was *'tweaked'*.

Teachers' Views on Impact

In spite of the different ways the programme was delivered in the six schools, the views of teachers on impact were remarkably similar.

1. The impact of ReConnect was varied. It had a direct impact on some students – definitely not on all - raising awareness and having an impact on behaviour. For some students the experience was just 'consolidating their preconceptions'; other students were 'more thoughtful' or 'reflective'. Some students had resisted participation; the most resistant to the underlying intentions of ReConnect were students who were heavy users of social media or very committed gamers. They often became stubborn in their resistance to the ideas in ReConnect materials and difficult to engage in balanced discussions.

'Some students were really prepared to engage. Some didn't, maybe because they were too self-conscious, or because it was too personal, too close and uncomfortable.' (School E)

2. At best ReConnect had been *'a platform to examine how time is spent on phones'*. That outcome was seen as very valuable by all schools. The examination was triggered by students logs of time spent on devices.

'The strongest aspect of the programme was when the students looked at their own behaviour with their devices.' (School A)

'The Activity Log was very effective in making students reflect on their actual behaviour.' (School B)

'The most noticeable outcome was students realising their time and reliance on digital technology'. (School C)

'The log of time spent was very important for focussing thinking and realisation'. (School E)

3. More widely, beyond logging time spent, the programme had opened up large questions. It had made students think and talk (some more than others). Its strengths were in its potential to encourage student response, make them engage and reflect, raise awareness.

It gave students an opportunity to voice their views.
Most students could see the issues but also discussed the positives.
It encouraged students to take stock, have a think.

Some teachers who sat in on the research interviews with students were surprised at the extent of recall the students had and the impact it had on them.

It was more profound than I thought it would be.' (School F)

Many teachers found it hard to get the students to buy into the reduction week. Those students who did it, their teachers felt, got a lot from it. Those students who had even a modest success felt good about the outcomes.

Teachers reported some students saying they would use continue to use devices less. Few teachers were optimistic about any lasting impact of the reduction week.

One teacher thought that with support some students might continue the behaviour change experienced during disconnect.

Teachers had learned more about their students and also from them.

‘I was impressed with the spectrum of opinions – covering both extremes. They had the confidence to get up and express themselves.’ (School B)

Teachers appreciated getting to know the children better; gaining insights into their personal lives and discovering that they were happy to share these.

Some teachers were surprised by what they learned about students’ digital lives: keen gamers were playing age-restricted games and said they had missed family occasions in order to continue the game; some girls said they would prefer to get negative feedback online rather than no feedback; they hated being ignored. Crossing the Line was ‘*an eyeopener*’ for some teachers. One teacher was surprised to find that some Year 8 students

don’t want to talk face-to-face and would rather message or Facetime; they say it’s easier.’

For some teachers the programme had also given them a different perspective on many aspects of the digital world and had made them think as well as the students

In School D where ReConnect had been coupled with a focus on group work, oracy (speaking and listening) and presentation, there were improvements in confidence in speaking, and in presentation skills. Teachers were surprised and pleased by the level of maturity students showed in discussions. Overall the Lead Teacher thought the project had had a positive impact and been more successful than she thought it would be, especially in its impact on the development of students’ talking and presenting skills.

Teachers’ Reflections on Outcomes

Teachers reflected on the experience of being involved with ReConnect and on the outcomes for them and for their students. Many reflections were common to all or many schools. The main points raised are noted here:

1. The differences in groups’ response to ReConnect may be related to the way the programme was delivered by teachers. It was considered important for tutors to be positive. Student responses and enjoyment would probably have been affected by which teacher they had.

Any impact will depend on how teachers developed and delivered it.’ (School E)

2. Any lack of long-term impact may be related to the lack of time available for follow-up activity.

3. The timing of ‘disconnect week’ was important and in some schools this was not scheduled at the most effective time. Ideally it should be in school time including a weekend, and not in holiday time. In most schools there was no cross-group system used for recording pledges to reduce or for monitoring how making pledges had been approached by different tutors. This was often very different in each group. It would have been good to focus more on this and to ensure there was more time for dealing with feedback from the students about the experience of disconnect. In School D there were incentives to participate in Disconnect

Week for staff and students. Teachers were thoughtful about the impact of this and agreed that there should be ways of encouraging students to take part in pledge week. Students, especially in Year 8 are perhaps too young to be intrinsically motivated:

they have no drive, which is something they need to succeed.'

4. Many teachers, not just those using the shortened version of the programme, mentioned time. Their fears before they started the programme had been confirmed. They felt the programme would be more effective given more time. It was *'time limited... and too rushed.'* Some activities needed more time – the lessons were overloaded. *'Less would be more.'*

5. There was agreement that the programme had

lots of scope in how to deliver it and that teachers have a natural tendency to adapt.

However the Scheme of Work was perceived as *'very tight'* on, for example, timings and as suggesting there was only *'one way'*. Most teachers disregarded this to make it work for them. It was felt that the choices within the Scheme of Work gave teachers a degree of *'ownership'*.

6. Teachers in several schools felt that some students thought some of the videos were extreme in their viewpoint, and saw them as critical and judgmental. This made them defensive and disinclined to engage. Some material was needed on the positives of digital devices, as a counterpoint.

'The students have assumed that it's telling them they are on their phones too much. It's hard to break through and convince them that it's not judging you. It's their experience, what school is – people telling them.' (School E) 'It would be more effective to come from a more open exploratory place. We wanted them to agree with us. They never would.' (School F)

7. Teachers felt that some students would have responded more positively to engaging with the topic if the approach had been more open and asked: Is this you? Do you recognise this? Ways needed to be found to explore (non judgmentally) students' behaviour with digital devices, to enable them to consider the implications. Teachers with close knowledge of students were very aware of the complex reasons for digital behaviour. Many of the most stubborn and resistant students have experienced or are experiencing not fitting in. They have learned that face-to-face communication and contact isn't good. Talking electronically is safer and easier.

8. Of all the content, the **Activity Log** was crucial in opening up discussion of how students actually use their devices.

Points raised in only one to schools are included because they have wider relevance.

1. In School B the Principal was thinking about alternatives for taking the programme forward. There were many issues and dilemmas to be faced. He was concerned about *'being too much at the front.'* He would like to delegate more but is aware of a number of issues around deploying and using staff for this sort of activity. Staff all have their own specialisms and a full teaching load. In his school they are involved because they are Year 10 or 9 Coaches (Form Tutors). 'There was a collective briefing for everyone about the programme but we could have had more and more training... There is also the question of capacity. Also PSHE is not everyone's cup of tea...and maybe there is something about ownership.' If the programme were

handed over to Coaches/Coaching Group time the groups would have to be larger. 'It makes it more interesting to have teachers with different attitudes and views involved and in the same room.'

2. Some teachers felt that reports from students that lessons had been 'fun' and enjoyable' might be because

they didn't have to do any writing or assessment.'

The programme encouraged lots of talking, but not enough doing from the students. It would be improved by getting the students to do more research elements rather than being told information; or undertaking more 'concrete activity' to develop the 'quality of thinking'.

3. Two teachers, both high users of digital devices, were concerned about the activity of logging time spent on devices, which many students found difficult. They were not sure what overall timings tell. Both recognise the phenomenon of not realising how much time passes when on a device which logging reveals. However, from personal experience, they distinguished between time spent gaming, where hours can pass without you realising it, and time spent on social media which is intermittent but can be continuous, constantly checking and responding. The students' device use they suggested *'is far more integrated than compartmentalized.'* One compared students' use of phones to *'wearing shoes'*.

6.2.3 Looking ahead

Each school had a very specific take on possible ways ahead. They are reported here.

School A

The view of the Head and senior teachers is that the focus of the ReConnect programme is valid and needed. Balance as a message is important and the students need reminding about the need to be balanced. The long-term the challenge is to embed it. It won't work as a one-off. Alongside the focus of ReConnect, it will be important to embed device use more firmly in teaching and learning in class. This normalisation of use for learning should run alongside considering use for personal and social purposes.

If there are clear benefits and it is possible to see attitudinal change, the Head wants to put ReConnect in the PSHE curriculum, not just in Form Tutor time. Using form tutors was potentially valuable but

it's difficult unless you have a dedicated team with everyone buying into it and with a shared viewpoint.

A more coherent team, including staff with commitment to the subject and the students, could be more effective.

A member of the SLT reflected that

'maybe 'addiction' is not a good word to use – though many feel this is in fact what some students are.'

The students will not recognise this as applicable to them. There are other ways of approaching this idea.

The non-teaching lead saw the pilot as ‘a starting point for cultural change’. She hoped the school would keep it running and build on it, though there were resource implications if it were to be successful. The school is considering peer to peer coaching. An idea is to appoint Ambassadors from this cohort who will work with the next Year 8. Also effective might be a ‘big bang’ start with an Assembly and possibly the involvement of outside/not school people.

School B

The school will continue with ReConnect in some form, not necessarily using the Scheme of Work. As a topic it fits well into the curriculum and learning cycle.

A 24 hour disconnect might be a good prelude to longer pledges later – it would provide good material for reflection and discussion.

There has been a suggestion to involve Sixth Form students as peer leaders. This could give the programme more traction in disconnect week and will be considered.

School C

Placing the ReConnect programme in Humanities affected the pattern of KS3 working:

it doesn’t fit with track points in assessment’.

This would need to be addressed if it remained in Humanities. However the view is that this should not be a one-off activity; alternatives are being considered for moving ahead:

‘enhancing and extending the programme’.

One view is that ReConnect is not a Humanities subject. However, *‘If we took it forward in our own way we could include citizenship and make links to ethics and issues in society’*. There are also aspects of the programme which lend themselves to inclusion in work on career paths, entrepreneurialism. The school is also considering the value of involving the PSHE lead in discussions about the programme. PSHE in School C is covered in Form Time.

Disconnect for a week as a single event could be valuable as a whole-school project. The school would have to be clear about why this was being done. Parents and students could be invited to look at the idea together. It would ideally be *‘threaded through curriculum and extra-curricular activity.’*

It was thought that the programme is useful for all year groups, except Year 7. If there is evidence of impact the school would consider widening the programme to 9 and 10.

School D

The School enjoyed being part of the project. It had given them a clearer idea of what they want to do. The Head thought it is important to open up and sustain a dialogue with students about how they are using digital devices. Reports had been of a beneficial impact with better friendships, more relaxed students. He could envisage the development of a comprehensive programme across all year groups. It would need to be *‘tailored to the time available and to our kids. I’d trust the team. We have lots of experts here who could design and deliver it.’* He would want to include parents, though they are reserved, and difficult to engage in activity. The local newspaper had given ReConnect a higher profile locally and the Lead Teacher was working on two videos which would be used in Assemblies and possibly shown to parents.

Teachers were most impressed by how much the students had got involved in the group work. In the ICT curriculum, students usually work individually on a computer. The HoD for IT was also impressed by outcomes and they are planning to incorporate more discussion, planning and presentations in future. The new IT curriculum enables discussion of ideas

about technology so aspects of the ReConnect programme content would fit well with this. The Lead Teacher was about to be involved in a digital literacy project at the University of Huddersfield, with a group of Y7 and Year 8 students. This was about 'being a digital influencer' and she felt it could be relevant to ReConnect and its development in the school.

However the other teacher participant in the study thought that if it was decided to run ReConnect again in ICT *'some teachers would be horrified.'*

Both teachers said they would want to change the Scheme of Work *'a lot'*. In-class groups should be smaller. They would need to consider classroom space. They liked the media content – *'that was good for us, an eye opener'* – but felt that it was important to find material that students would find relevant and engaging.

They agreed that Year 8 was the best year to run the programme. Year 7 was too early and the school starts GCSE courses in 9.

The Head felt that the natural place for ReConnect would be in Learning for Life (PSHE). All students have one hour a week on PSHE. The content includes sex and relationships, drug use, democracy, British values, personal finance, careers. The approach is though debate and discussion.

School E

The view was that the topics ReConnect addresses *'merit inclusion in PSHE.'* However there were things about the Scheme of Work teachers would change. The tasks needed to be framed better to support the transitions from tasks that encourage open-ended discussion to follow-up active/task.

In addition, ReConnect did not seem *'very open; it appears to have a desired outcome.'* Controlling outcomes, teachers said, runs against PSHE philosophy: the idea is to raise issues, get students thinking.

The position of PSHE in the school curriculum is problematic in relation to the demands that can be made on teachers. *'PSHE doesn't produce attainment data, it has low status, Some teachers like to do it and do it very well – but there is no structure to support them or it...there's no allowance for meetings, observations, continuing professional development training.'*

School F

The main teacher involved in the workshop approach thought ReConnect was *'an interesting and valuable project...if there was a way of doing it more easily.'* It required a great deal of organisation and commitment from teachers.

She saw ReConnect as *'a pastoral thing'* and *'we couldn't incorporate it into the way we run PSHE here.'* It might fit into *'society, ethics and beliefs'*, a theme in Y7/8.

Deciding which year groups to put it in was seen as a problem. She thought Year 8 were too young. *'We see a big jump between Year 8 and 9. But 9 has issues in that the pressure on KS4 exams starts early, in 9.'*

Some of ReConnect might be *'doable as a discrete workshop, out of curriculum time...It might fit in a very well organised day.'*

Summary

The mode of delivery of ReConnect was different in each school, as was the motivation for implementing the project as explained by Head Teachers or Senior Leaders. All schools wanted students to become more aware of their device use and to think about balance between online and offline behaviour; all had had some experience of dealing with inappropriate device use or internet-based issues. Several had introduced Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies and were observing and adjusting to the outcomes. Beyond that the reasons each school gave for liking the programme had different emphases. In three schools the programme fitted with a different but related whole-school or key stage focus: digital leadership; developing a growth mindset/resilience in students; mental health. One Head was most concerned about the amount of time young people and adults spent online and hoped students would reconsider their reliance of devices. A Deputy Principal hoped the programme would empower students to use devices sensibly, harnessing the advantages of technology and learning that there are other offline things to do.

All schools recognised that some of the content of the Scheme of Work duplicated things they were already covering in the e-safety and PSHE curriculum. They felt reinforcement was useful. Some students agreed, more thought it was unnecessary and repetitious.

In general teachers who were to deliver the programme welcomed it as something that would encourage students to think and raise awareness. Attitudes to digital technologies varied widely among the teacher group but all shared concerns about device use which, like those of the students in Section 5, reflected worries found in the media and popular discourse.

In practice, both before and during the programme, teachers experienced very different amounts of support and opportunities to share experiences. This was largely associated with a differential allocations of resource time to facilitate this, or with the mode of delivery. In School B, the total number of Year 9 and Year 10 students was less than 100. Students and teachers were able to gather in one space for workshops led by the Principal and facilitated by teachers. In another school a non-teaching lead had time to support Form Tutors who had no allocation of preparation time themselves. In contrast in a school where ReConnect was located in the PSHE curriculum, teachers for PSHE were not specialists in that area: they were specialists in other subject areas who had volunteered or were required to take on this role. They were allocated no preparation or meeting time; lesson plans and resources were issued and they used them as they thought best.

In all schools, whatever the level of support, individual teachers were selective about the ReConnect Scheme of Work. They adapted, omitted and added to resources and activities to suit the students they were working with and the time available. Most teachers commented on problems with attempting everything stipulated within the time. 'Less is more' was frequent comment. Some of the resources and activities were generally successful in all schools in provoking discussion and engaging interest. The activity of logging time spent was seen as particularly effective in raising student awareness and making them think. Take Home tasks were problematic where the programme was concentrated in a few weeks, or where homework was not required for PSHE or Form Tutor time.

Teachers reported that student response also varied. In some groups most students were positive and engaged; in others resistance, shown by many, was associated with a defensive

reaction to an early perception that the programme was designed to stop them using their devices. Teachers' own attitudes and their success in mediating the programme content appear to be important variables. Varied take-up of the challenge to disconnect in pledge week can also be associated with how teachers and schools managed the activity, how consistently the emphasis on participation was sustained, whether expectations were set and incentives introduced.

In terms of impact teachers thought the ReConnect project had enabled many or some of their students to explore, articulate and discuss attitudes and opinions around the use of digital technologies. The activity of logging time spent on devices had for many students been most effective in provoking reflection. For some students this had encouraged behavioural change, though most teachers were sceptical about whether this would be sustained in the long-term. Many teachers felt that overall the programme would be more successful if the approach was more open and less apparently judgemental.

Senior teachers felt that the ideas included in ReConnect programme were important and should continue to be included in the curriculum; enabling students to articulate, discuss and reflect on their views, behaviour and experiences was important, as was finding opportunities for them to lead. However there were a number of practical issues to be faced in actioning this, not least those related to demands that can be made on teachers, available teacher time, creating effective teacher teams, funding support and training to maximise positive outcomes for all. The powerful impact of Pledge Week where it worked well (and the fact that for many students ReConnect was essentially about pledging to disconnect) made some schools wonder about confining activity to this challenge.

The Reception of the Programme by School Students

The research design incorporated two focus groups in each school, with on average six students in each group. For two schools there were two visits: an initial visit before the programme as well as a second one after the programme, and for four, there was a single visit, after the programme. One school (School D) organised six smaller focus groups and fewer one-to-one interviews; School B organised three. Hence, the information included here is drawn from the participation of 34 boys and 43 girls, across all the schools, mainly in Year 8 but also in Year 9 and Year 10.

The students who took part in the focus groups were selected by the lead teacher in each school. For the most part these students were those who had been actively involved in the programme, were generally positive and had attempted some form of disconnect. It is interesting that the discussion arising from this focus group activity led students to comment on their fellow students whose responses to the programme were more negative, who had not participated in making a pledge to disconnect and were often oppositional.

A more downbeat, rather negative response was also present in one-to-one interviews and in other parts of the focus groups. Focus group members from one particular school in the research were not enthusiastic about ReConnect. In some cases this reflected strongly held individual ideas and opinions, others were more widely shared. For example, students felt they had already been exposed to the information and ideas in the programme. This was mentioned in other schools, yet students in those schools were more willing to encounter the messages and ideas and to discuss them.

In each focus group the students were asked, individually or in pairs, to write down three words or phrases to communicate their experience of being involved in the ReConnect

programme. These were then shared, explained, discussed and expanded on. In one case, time available meant that this activity was not included. The words chosen and the discussion that ensued provide an interesting summary and insight into students' experience of the programme. For that reason we report it fully here.

School A: Year 8: 6 girls

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect of their experience of ReConnect

Eye-opening, understanding, difficult

Realisation, short-term, informative

Enlightening, difficult, unrealistic

Unnecessary, essential

Students in this group found that the programme made them think and become more aware. They were very concerned to discuss the impact of the programme on different kinds of students and what might be preventing some from responding positively and changing their behaviour. They saw challenges and problems.

I think it changes you but I'm not sure...

It's dependent on the person.

Yes, because some people would see it differently; for some people it might not be as worthwhile as others. Some people might need it a lot more than others because some people might be able to manage it quite well and others are addicted to their phone and can't...

Yes, but for others it could be essential.

They were not sure that those students who needed it most would engage with the programme. Some were more optimistic than others about this and felt that the programme would have some sort of, even tiny, impact on everyone. Others thought this was unrealistic, given the powerful role of digital technologies in society.

Because they're already addicted.

Yes, and they'll probably just think, "We've heard this stuff about phones being bad for us" but I think with the ReConnect project, it helps you get involved with it more instead of just hearing about it.

Yes, because some people bother to try but some of them don't really. Because they're so addicted, they feel like they can't have fun without it, so they just don't try and they just give up too easily.

I think that for everyone – I think for everyone, even if you didn't do it for very long, you did it for a day or even if you aren't going to go back to it when it's over, I think still for everyone I think if they've made people realise even just a little bit that overall everyone spends a bit too much time on their phone. I think it made them realise – I don't think a lot of people do anything about it but I think it will have made people realise what it's like for everyone.

I think it's a good idea but I think, to be honest, our society nowadays, I think it's unrealistic for people to make a change on their usage of their phone because nowadays the majority of people's lives revolve around the internet and social media and even talking to people and even now, even nowadays, you wouldn't – I personally wouldn't expect – if you wanted to meet up with your friend you wouldn't call them up in the telephone box, you would message them or snapchat them or something and I think it's just a bit unrealistic to – for certain people, the majority of people to change the way they use their phones.

They discussed whether it was unrealistic to be informed by the programme and be able to decide for yourself about making a change.

I think that's the good side of it.

I think the – if you're informed, it's still quite hard to change because even when you go to Nando's or places to have a meal, you can still connect – there's still loads of things on the menu telling you to – or you can connect through this and that and you can view it through your phone.

I feel like it's – the generation that we're in and technology has become a major part of it, researching it, finding out what it can do and I've seen in even cafes and things and especially McDonalds, they have places you can just leave your phone to charge in public places and phones originally, they had a long battery life and they're small and compact just to call people and text people for emergencies, whereas obviously as time has gone on, you can have apps and message people through different things and some people – sometimes people don't even want to call people, they just think texting is easier.

There followed a fascinating discussion of the differences between texting/messaging and talking; and which is easier. The group finally considered the possible lasting impact of the programme and discussed the meaning of 'short-term'

Because some people, if they don't really want – if they don't want to do it or they might do it for the time that they've been told to do it for and then they might think after that it might not – it might not carry on at all and they might think, "Well now I've been told that I can – I don't have to do it any more" then if they are addicted, they might just go back.

It really depends because some people just do it because there's actually a reason to do it but if there isn't a reason, some people find it quite pointless to do.

School A: Year 9: 6 girls

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Guilt, unhelpful, productive

Awareness, unhelpful, productive

Organised, aware, productive

This group chose to focus first on the activity of logging screen time and the perceived stance of the programme on use of phones in particular. Some cynical and self-aware comments typify much of the response of this group and of Year 9 in general. The discussion reveals the paradoxes and tensions in their responses to the programme. They think it's a really important project, but don't think it's been very helpful. They think it is organised and productive but are not sure of its overall impact

It makes you more aware.

Aware how much screen time you use.

With the screen logs, it was good and it was really organised, but it just made you think about how much you were spending on everything, like really aware, and then you just felt bad for, like, every minute you're on your phone, really.

I felt a bit guilty.

Yeah.

Because even though I believe that I don't use my phone too much, but it kind of made me feel guilty anyway because it showed us how bad it is to use your phone too much and how it can affect you and other people around you.

We felt guilty whilst we were doing it, but afterwards, it was fine.

I guess it's not that helpful because I guess we already know most of this stuff.

Yeah.

It was quite productive, though.

Yeah.

Yeah.

We didn't take any new information in.

It gave us something to do instead of using screen time, using a screen.

I think it's good how organised it was and there were lots of activities to do.

It could have things to do instead of going on our phones, say.

Like, told what we could do instead.

Maybe if it wasn't just looking at a screen and using screens, because a lot of our class found that quite ironic. That one where we had to stand in the middle of the room and walk, kind of thing. That was more useful than just sitting there and watching a PowerPoint, kind of thing or a video.

School B: Year 10: 5 boys

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Not too bad

Beneficial and positive

Happy and enlightened

Good, difficult, exciting

Difficult, frustrating, opportunities

For these boys their reflections were mainly related to the disconnect week, although in other parts of the interview they could recall other activities. Their choice of words was firmly rooted in recall of how they managed their disconnect, how they felt about it, what they did when without devices. Their discussion led them to some considered thoughts about ReConnect overall.

It seems to be fairly average with me cause, like, the actual disconnect part, cause sometimes my parents will take my Playstation, like, off me, and they've done it for longer than a week, so, it's not really too bad.

Good, difficult, and exciting. I like the bit where we had to record what we did throughout the week. Yeah. Because, basically, you could read what you'd done, and you could, basically, change it. It was hard trying to remember to actually fill it in.

It was good, because, like, just looking at, like, how much time I spent on listening to music, watching videos, playing games. Like, it just seemed really surprising, just how long I spent on it.

I put difficult, because it's difficult to not do, unless you're comfortable with it every day. It's frustrating, because you think, oh yay, I can play my games when I get home, and do what I want to do, but then you think, oh wait, I've got to do this for a week, so I can't. So, that's annoying. But I think it opens opportunities for you to do other things. Because if you're not on your devices, you're thinking about the next source of entertainment. So, if you have a secondary source of entertainment, then you might come off your devices more to do that, but, you might find it more fun.

I wrote happy and enlightened. Because it, kind of, made me, you know, understand and know, why people are telling me to get off my phone, and just, kind of, it enlightened me to all the wonderful things outside in the world, that aren't just on a phone.

I felt the fact that I was connected to the parents more than usual, like. I still will connect with them, but it was just above average.

I wrote down beneficial and positive. Cause I thought it would be, like, a really good thing to, like, just take a break from, like, using all technology constantly.

I think that this is a good cause, it's just not enough children will give it a try, and we haven't got many kids doing it, because they didn't see any point. Well, I didn't take it seriously at the start, but I just thought, I'll give it a go. But I think, yeah, that's why there's only a few of us doing it; because they saw it as - there's nothing in this for me, there's no point in trying it. It's just, I'm going to have to put myself in pain of not going to do what I want, just because the school's asked me.

Yeah, for some people, yeah, because I think that some people would just think, like, oh, yeah, I have complete control over my use of technology. I know exactly what I'm doing. And realistically, sometimes they don't.

School B: Year 10: 4 boys, 2 girls

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Useful, easy, realisation

Unnecessary, easy, outside

Social, controlled, freedom

Freedom, challenge, useful

Perspective-changing, enjoyable, different

Educational, challenging, surprising

This group began by talking about the disconnect experience. The choice of 'outside' by one participant led to a fascinating discussion about the association of 'outside' with activity, sociability, freedom and 'inside' with inactivity, separateness, introversion: all involving technology.

I put freedom, challenging, and useful. Well, it's not that it was hard to do. It's just like to challenge yourself with self-control and stuff.

Well, I didn't think that ReConnect itself was challenging. It was just before when you were giving your phone in, that was challenging because you didn't know how difficult it was actually going to be.

It did change my perspective sort of... Well, obviously it depends from person to person, but me personally I think that originally I had this sort of prejudice that giving up technology for a week would be extremely difficult because of how much I'd use it and rely on it and things, but in actual proved quite the contrary, that you can actually still enjoy life and stay communicated and connected even without technology.

Well, I was surprised at that... I did think at the start that it was going to be very difficult, but I was surprised it wasn't

The talk then turned to 'freedom' and outside'

Yeah. Going out, it's like, it's freedom, really. You know, we're caught up in this bubble of virtual reality and technology, but when you go outside it's free. There's no... Nothing's stopping you from doing what you want, but there are no... If you want to put down your phone, you don't have to be on your phone when you're outside. It's just the free will to me.

Well, going outside, it's just anything apart from indoors really. It could be anything; it could be going out on a bike or just exploring other areas that aren't restricted to where you live.

Yeah. Like it could just be like anything, like going out to walk your dog or something or it could be like going to meet friends.

Well, when I go out, I go out with me mates and I just go out really. Like every time we go out we do something different, it depends.

Yeah. It's going out with your friends, but also I feel like it's like activities that you can do which are like playing football, playing sports, or like going to places like, parks and things like that.

Well, when we think of technology we often associate it with being inside and sort of disconnecting yourself from everything that's outside, but it doesn't necessarily mean that when you're indoors you're using technology, like you said, you can still do other things while indoors.

Yeah. I read a lot. I read, I do quite a bit of art and then... It's technically inside, because I do dance and things like that, which is obviously inside, so yeah.

Play my bass a bit, read, just generally ... small things.

I read a lot and play my instruments.

I read a lot of books, and practice guitar, I do drawing. All sorts of things like that.

I do... Like I read books and I play piano, and do guitar.

Having disproved the stereotypical idea of 'inside' they began to consider where that idea came from and found themselves recalling people who fitted the stereotype.

I have had friends in the past who rather than wanting to go outside and that, they would prefer to just stay with technology.

Yeah. Like my sister spends all her time in her room, like talking to friends over like Skype and face-time and that, so rather than actually going outside to meet them. She'd more like rather just do it over the internet.

Like, my little cousin, he literally games like say like seven hours a day. He's literally in his bedroom all the time. He doesn't... Like when I go and see him, it's like I go in and he's literally sat there on the Xbox and he doesn't... Like, he'll talk to me, but it's like he doesn't want to do anything else that's not the Xbox.

This exchange provoked a long and complex contribution from one of the girls. She began by trying to distinguish between different types of people who might be said to be 'addicted' to technology. She then brought in a new idea of the role technology plays for people with social anxiety or agoraphobia and this led her to talk about herself and her fear/dislike of cities and crowded places. She ended with the idea that many people who use technology have issues, but reminds the group of reasons why this might be so.

I think sometimes like you said, you get people that just decide to use technology more than they would want to go and see people, but they can like stop themselves from using it. But, then you get some people that you could say, you are addicted, but that is really a category in itself, because you can get...

There isn't... You can't say that everybody uses technology will be addicted to it at some point or something like that, but there's only a few people that have like addictive tendencies, but you could measure that on different scales for different people. But, I think it's more that most of the people that you hear about that don't really...

Like from my point of view, because I know a lot of people that do use technology and will do stuff more at home than they will go out, it's because they have like, say like social anxiety or, you know, they have problems like talking to people or don't like open spaces, and like me especially because I come from a village, I don't really like the big cities and stuff like that, so I don't really go out in the city very often, because I live in the country and so I don't like...

I'll go out sometimes, but I don't really like it because there's so many people there and there's so much stuff going on that it's just too much. But, most of the people that I know that do use technology quite a bit, do have issues and I think that's because of it's quite a rising thing, recently. Just that a lot of people have a lot more like social anxiety, and anxiety issues, or like social issues with different people that it stops them.

Later they returned to the idea of finding alternatives to using digital devices and even to express some dissatisfaction with a phone

Just because we sort of realised that there are actually things there to do. We just think that there's nothing to do because there's nothing immediately there, so we just immediately go to technology for answers to fill time basically.

You've got to look about the things a bit harder and then you'll find them.

Also, quite often get bored if I use my phone because I don't really have much I like to do on there.

School B: Year 9: 3 girls

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Difficult, interesting, social interaction

Interesting, informative, mind-opening

Difficult, mind-opening, interesting.

The girls in this group were so engaged with other aspects of the discussion that there was no time to allow them to expand on their choice of words.

School C: Year 8: 3 boys, 3 girls.

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Shocked, made you think, changed my view

Worried, strange, good

Eye-opening, consequences, positive

Different, muddled/confused, glad

Interested, eye-opening, impact

Mind-opening, surprised, grateful

This group began by explaining their choices to each other. The impact of discovering how long each spent using digital devices was very strong across the group, as was the new knowledge some had encountered about possible outcomes of 'over use'. All had been made to think about themselves and the digital world.

My first word was 'eye-opening' because I think lots of people didn't realise how much time they were spending and it, sort of, brought everyone's attention to the fact. Then I put 'consequences' because it affected quite a lot of people, and, at the end, they were either positive or negative consequences of the project. Mostly positive, and then my final word was actually 'positive' itself, because I think, if we hadn't done it, it wouldn't have helped quite a few people.

I have, like, 'shock' because I didn't realise that a phone addiction could be, like, treated like a drug addiction and a drinking addiction, and things like that. I don't think a lot of us realise the severity of it, and we're, like, 'Oh, it's just a phone'. We didn't realise what it was classed as, and then it, like, made you think, like maybe should I shut down, not shut down, maybe should I cut off my internet access and stuff, and then it, like, changed views. Like, it changed my view, but certain people, they didn't really. Some people, it changed, like, how they thought of it, but then certain people were just, like, 'No, I don't really care about this'.

I've got 'mind-opening' because I was, kind of, like, quite taken aback by, like, how much the effect are having. I was surprised, because I was, like, I was, kind of, shocked and surprised, like, how much I was using, and I wasn't aware of it, and I've also got 'grateful' because I felt very grateful for what I do actually have access to, because, I was, kind of, abusing it.

I put 'worried' because I was worried whether it would affect my health or anything, like going on my phone and looking at screens too much. Then I put 'strange' because when I did manage to get off, like, my technology, I was just, sort of, sat downstairs doing nothing, and it felt really weird. And then I felt good when I did manage to get off it.

I felt different, as I didn't think that the amount of time I was spending was going to be different to other people's. And it was very different. The amount of time I spent. I didn't realise how fast it went. I thought it went really fast, and I didn't realise how much time I've actually spent, more time than other people. I felt confused, as I didn't know how bad my addiction was to playing online and watching people play online, and I felt glad at the end when I was able to cut down an hour on playing everything.

I put 'interested'. I think some of the points it raised were very interesting, and the information it gave, I think, it interested a lot of people. I put 'eye-opening' the same as D. for the same reasons, and I put 'impact' because I think it changed a lot of different people, and it certainly made me think.

The students were very aware of the changes in their views and also of the lack of change in many of their peers. They then went on to discuss the idea of positive and negative consequences that has been raised earlier; this proved to be about reception the programme.

Well, the majority of people, I think it was actually taking them aback, the consequences, because it made them realise and they thought, 'I'm not just going to realise and not do anything about it'. Lots of people actually tried to make a difference. Some people carried on as usual, which I suppose isn't as good, but then, at the same time, it's a good thing that they realised, possibly, the effect that it might have on them, and it might help them in the future.

In our class, we were watching the video, you know where, like, this girl jumps from a building. Did you see that one? Well, loads of people were shouting out, 'Well, it's not that bad. People don't do that. People don't, like, just film suicides,' but they do, so loads of people didn't take it seriously, and I don't think some of them realised how severe it can get. Then, loads of them just, like, blanked it, but then some people took it in and realised, 'Oh my God, this is happening'.

Some people didn't listen, that is very true. Like, some people that just had no intention of changing, or trying to change, they were just, like, 'Oh, that's just another video that we're watching in school,' but it's not because, like, that is happening, and if they knew somebody, or if that happened to anybody close to them, then they would be shocked, but if they'd listened then they would have been aware of what could be making people do these things.

It's just insensitive people who don't realise the problems that this can cause, and I think the ReConnect Project really showed that, and, even if some people just ignored it, that's their own arrogance, it's nothing to do with the ReConnect Project itself.

School C: 3 boys 3 girls

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Surprising, easy, fun

Interesting/different, shocking, surprising

Interesting, fun, surprising

Enjoyable

Surprised, fun, different

Fun, interesting, good opportunity

Different, fun, not boring

This group explored the idea of feeling surprised. They began by focusing on being surprised by their own behaviour and the time they spent on phones, tablets and computers. They then moved on to talk about some of the content of the programme they had found interesting and surprising, and enjoying something that was not like their usual curriculum.

Well it was fun, it was interesting as well, and it was a good opportunity. Like, to show you what the effects of technology can have.

I put surprised, because I was surprised how much time I spent on my phone. I found it like fun, really enjoyable, because it was something else that we hadn't done before. Then, I put different as well, because it was different to the things that we had done.

I put surprising, because I was surprised how long I spent on my phone, and it was easier to give it up after the ReConnect Project, and it was also fun.

I put interesting, because it was a bit different to what we usually do. Shocking to find out how much time I spent on screens, and surprising.

I thought it was fun. And, it was quite surprising how much time I was spending on my phone and computer.

Like X said, things like different and fun. But, also it's not as boring as the other lessons, so it's like we enjoyed it, kind of.

Was there anything else that surprised you?

Yeah, because I don't know if any of you saw but there was this camp for like these Japanese kids that like, spent too much time on their phones, because there was one kid didn't go out of his room for six months so he was hunger, starved and then they were in this like camp where they teach kids not to spend all their time on them.

It made me think like, the consequence that being on technology can have. It was definitely surprising.

I thought like, if you are on your tablet or phone or whatever for a long, long period of time and don't go out with anybody, and just see people a lot less, you should like have a punishment like not go on it, but not sent to a boot camp where they basically just make it so you, just punish you.

I was quite shocked about the punishment for it, and I don't think I could spend six months without going on my phone.

I thought it was quite sad, because they were on their phones and I get that they should be punished but not in that way. But, they don't get to see their families for so long.

They were being cured and punished..bit of both.

It was definitely both because there was, I can't remember but this one guy -

He wouldn't speak to the dad, he would only write notes, he wouldn't speak to him because he was so mad at him for what he did to put him in there, so he kept writing notes to the man.

School E: Year 8: 3 boys 3 girls

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

It was good; For some people it really helped; But most people have already thought about it. Didn't change much; we were forced to be involved; probably had different outcomes if we'd chosen to take part

Felt involved; had heard a lot of the views/arguments; good to involve teens

Bored, preached

Boring; times have changed, people have changed; people telling other people how to live their life is bad.

Surprised about the amount of time people spent; felt involved with other people.

This group was largely negative about their ReConnect experience. They appreciated being involved in the discussion of the topic but thought they had heard all the arguments before. Some felt the programme might have done some good to some students but not to them. They disliked what they saw as the anti-technology stance of the programme and resented being told what they should be doing. They talked about balance and control.

I think that we could have been learning more useful things in PSHE. Because this Re-Connect project was pretty boring, and times have changed, people have changed and people who don't understand the change are telling others how to live their life. It was telling you 'Don't go on phones, phones are bad, all technology is evil', and stuff like that.

So, it probably would have had more of an outcome if we did it under our own choice.

Because we were forced to take part in the project.

I thought it was, like, helpful but I think most people have thought about how much time they are spending.

I think it was good that they decided to involve teenagers, and perhaps, like, a different view on the argument. But, again, a lot of the views and stuff have been heard before.

I felt like I'd, kind of, been preached to by people that don't really fully understand the thing they were preaching about.

I think it was good that they involved everyone, but maybe it wasn't the right choice. Like, some people were very interested in the, like, topic but some people weren't perhaps, like, paying too much attention or...

Pretty much everything that was shown to us was telling us, 'It's bad, there needs to be a balance' and people would show... they had real life experiences with technology and stuff they'd done was always, they'd stopped for a long amount of time. There was never anything saying why technology is good and how it's good to be involved in that.

Yeah, because a lot of the students in the class did have that point of view, there weren't many who thought all technology should be gone, there shouldn't be any. So, that was a view that was raised a lot when we were asked.

Yeah, because especially the Moby one was all about how we're being brainwashed by our phones, which I think... it was a little over the top.

I think we are, kind of, already in control... we're in control that we can make the decision to be on our phones as much as we want. I've decided to use my phone, to, you know, use it in the way I do. To choose what to share, I think that's control.

I think it just means being able to choose when to do it. For instance, like X said, if you can't do it then you don't really have control of whether you want to do it or not.

Well I suppose, like, choosing to do other stuff because... if you don't want to... the difference between not wanting to do something and not being able to. So, if you can put something down and go... put your, like, technology down and go and do something else that's great. But if you can't put it down, there's a problem. And maybe it can be hard to distinguish between those problems.

No-one thought they had ever experienced any problem in 'putting technology down'. They said they did not know anyone who had a problem. Some said that their parents thought they had a problem.

They think it's too much, for me. But, like, the more that they use it, the more that I show them, they kind of understand, like, all the possibilities and, like, what you could be doing.

School E: Year 8: 3 girls 2 boys

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Interesting, pointless, can be boring, fun

Interesting, boring

Interesting sometimes, a bit boring others

Moderation, inefficient

OK, a bit silly, understandable, overdramatic/more overuse, questionable

This group had mixed feelings about ReConnect. Their discussion of finding it interesting and boring led them to trying to sort out the concept of control.

I put it can be boring. A bit pointless sometimes. It is interesting though.

Interesting, boring.

I also put it can be interesting sometimes but other bits are a bit boring

Interesting, I like the lesson. Inefficient waste of time and they've not put in the right moderations at all. Moderations of what we actually spend on our phones at all. Nobody actually knows how long people spend on their phone. They seem to think oh, you spend hours. I don't. I don't even have a phone.

Okay, a bit silly, overdramatic/more over use, understandable and questionable.

It can be interesting because you find out like some people are like very addicted to their phones and it was interesting to see how they're like – well, how they want to change it.

Well, sometimes yeah, like the subject of like crime, that can be quite interesting and, you know, phones.

Well, you obviously just need to put everything into moderation and we spend too much time but they've not actually done any sort test to find out how much time anyone really does spend on phones, tables, games, whatever. I know how much time I spend. I've got an app. I've got it on my tablet, not a phone. I spend less time actually than I thought I did. I spend about 20 minutes in the morning and about an hour and a half at night.

The most time I spend on my phone, I like – because every night after school, I video chat my friends so like in a way, I feel like I'm interacting at the same time and that's the main thing I really use my phone for, it's like interacting with other people. From after school to like 9pm. I go down when my mum calls me for tea so I go down and eat my tea and then I go back up and I call my friends again and then I go downstairs at 9pm and I watch my favourite TV programme and then I go to bed.

Do you think it would be better just to meet up with your friends and kind of like go to the park or something?

Yeah, but some of them live like a long way from me and that so we can't always do that.

I think they've just made phones like... well, the best thing I'd compare it to is an electric vape. It's just a drug that – a drug basically or it's completely addictive but it doesn't cause any permanent harm but you can't stop. You pay for your phone which is hundreds of pounds and then you get, you just find games and plusses for it and whatnot. Because they've made it to be addictive. The whole point of a game-maker is to make the most addictive game ever. The more addictive, the more people play it, the more advertisements, the more money for them.

Games are designed so you keep on playing them so companies can make more money.

Snapchat and Instagram are designed to keep people on there as well. Well, they are.

They are designed to keep you on

Well, I don't ever download games on my phone. The only thing I download is things to interact with my friends so in a way, not really because I'm never on my phone if I'm out with my friends, I'm never on my phone. The only time I'm on my phone is when I'm talking to my friends so not really because I don't download games.

School F: Year 8: 2 boys 2 girls

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Interesting

Neutral

Eye-opening, interesting, different

Understandable, eye-opening, interesting

Weird, funny, different

Students in this group enjoyed having a workshop that was different in content and approach, though one thought she was already informed and had made up her mind about phone use so was 'neutral'. Both the experience of the programme and deciding to stop using a phone were 'different'.

'Weird', 'funny,' and, 'different' from all the other workshops we've been in, and it's kind of different from, like... It's different to stop using your phone for a while, because normally – when my phone was working – I'd be on it steadily.

Because, usually, when we do workshops, it's about e-safety, and keeping safe online; but then, this workshop was telling us how we should, like, take some time offline and do things with our family, and do that stuff.

Yeah, we usually get the message, "Oh, stay safe online. Don't do this, don't do that".

They showed us videos, they gave us scenarios.

The one with the guy that was trying to get to everyone, and then everyone was just on their phone, and someone jumped off the building, and everyone was just filming it.

There was one that was, like, about this camp in – I think it might have been China. It was like, you were too addicted to your phone, you get sent there, like detox.

That if they just banned the social media on your phone, from everyone, for a long time, I thought that was bad, because they just banned it. There was no social media; so if they got social media again, they would just start using it.

Yes, of course, because it would have been so boring there.

I put 'neutral'. Because, like, my parents always lecture me about being on my phone too much, or stuff like that, or if social media's bad for me, and my phone's bad for me. So, I already know the negatives of social media, but I also know what's good for me and what's bad for me, because I already experienced the bad stuff, and I know what's good for me, so... This project, I already knew what it was going to talk about – that stuff. The project wasn't bad, but I already knew what I should do on social media.

I also put 'eye-opening', but then 'understandable' and 'interesting'. Because, like, I've never thought about coming off my phone. It's always been about how to stay safe online, but it's never been about coming offline, or...

I'd miss my phone, if I wouldn't be on it for six months.

What was eye-opening was how much time you spent on a phone.

School D: Year 8: 3 boys 2 girls

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Stay off consoles; helps you get interactive with family and friends

Enjoyable, good, eye-opening

Interesting, fun, eye-opening,

Fun, waste of time for me, eye-opening

Eye-opening, great, enjoyable

Explanations of their choices in this group were mainly related to the idea (and experience) of time spent on the internet and the consequences of overuse

It was eye-opening because you could see how much you actually went on the internet to like how you spent time with family.

Well, eye-opening I would say is like, well, just, it's a shock to see like what could happen and how much time you're missing out from your family.

It is quite eye-opening to see that you can't get that time back.

Well, at the start I've got to confess that I actually I did like strain my eyes because of doing it in the dark, but now we've got it under control so it's a bit of a waste of time for me.

School D: Year 8: 2 girls 2 boys

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Fun, creative

Interesting, eye-opening

Sociable, connected, interesting

Interesting, experience, eye-opening, fun

Becoming aware of the amount of time they spent on the internet was the factor underpinning the responses of this group.

It's eye-opening because it's like we don't really realise how much time we spend on the internet and then when we look back on it it's quite a lot.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Because like sometimes when you're like just on your like phone or something you don't realise how much time you spend on it.

Like since now I've never really thought about how much time I spent on it but like now we're doing this now I actually think about how much time I'm spending on it. Like before I was spending like quite a lot like four hours a day something like that. A bit too much.

I spent like more than four hours a day on the internet but now I like remind myself to like go off it like before I go to bed and stuff so you're not always on the phone.

Well, I'm going out a lot more now because I don't want to spend as much time on internet so I'm going out.

School D: Year 8: 2 girls 1 boy

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Hopeful, boring, isolated

Disconnected, interesting, more social

Interesting, expressive, fun

The experience of not using a phone was the basis for most explanations. The combination of positive and negative feelings about this interested them. This led them to reflecting on those of their peers who has not responded to the programme.

I felt disconnected, it was interesting, but I felt more social.

Hopeful, it was kind of boring, and isolated.

Yeah. Because like not being on your phone or like Facebook. Anything that happens around the world goes on Facebook, and if you're not on your Facebook then you don't what's happening.

By boring I think she means like because she would like use like the internet to like research for her homework and that, and if she's not using it she'll like have to work it out herself which might be harder.

OK. Kind of, but I wasn't –
 You watch YouTube a lot.
 Yeah. I'm obsessed with YouTube so it was boring not being on YouTube
 Most of the others thought it was all stupid, boring
 Almost all of them.
 A few of them
 We thought it's alright.
 It's alright, but then because of my parents work with social media and things like that, so they're always on their laptop, and if I had to tell them to do this, they'd be like, "What do you mean? That's stupid". And probably some ...

School D: Year 8: 3 boys 2 girls

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Different, helpful
 More social
 Bond, enlightened, fun
 Bonding, building relationships
 Difficult, hard, struggled

The dominant thread in the explanations of students in this group focused on the difficulties and challenge of trying to be without a phone.

I think it feels like it's hard to like get off of your phones and all that, it can be really, you can be really attracted to it all the time because it's going to have like loads of stuff what you're attracted to on it.
 Yeah, because you're so used to like going on your phones, it's like ... it's unusual to have it not with you all the time.
 Yeah, because you're used to like going on them so much and you never realise how much you are on them.
 Yeah, I agree with that. Yeah. Because like, you're used to having it with you all the time and then we aren't having it, it feels like different.
 I said hard, because I'm usually, I never put my phone down and I'm literally on it all the time and I get it took off me on a weekend. My mum, when she goes to work at the weekend. So, I know that I can be more sociable at dance and other things because I go to dance on weekends. I'm fine with it because that means I can like get more time to spend with my friends and everything.

School D: Year 8: 3 girls 1 boy

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Interesting, challenging, factual
 Enjoyable, factual, challenging
 Challenging, interesting, enjoyable
 Outstanding, challenging, interesting
 Challenging, exciting

Experiencing the challenge to disconnect was behind the strongest responses in this group. They also talked about the enjoyment of doing something that was radically different from their usual IT curriculum content and way of learning: in particular they mentioned working in groups and being creative.

That it was very difficult to try and understand what it's trying to say because a lot of people spend a lot of time on their phones and stuff and it was challenging to try and reduce your time on your devices.

Because it's reducing – the challenging part was reducing the time you spend...

Doing the poster was enjoyable.

I think it was a good thing to do in IT time. Because normally we'd just be doing stuff more on the computer than understanding each other and trying to do different things instead of just being on the computer.

Yes, because sometimes we're always on computers and we never do work, so...

You get to cooperate more. With the class instead of just working on one project.

I thought it was good because you could talk to other people around you as well while you're doing it and try and – you could see what they're doing and stuff instead of having to do it by yourself.

Interesting that it's bad for your mental health

We were doing this thing where everybody was having their own opinions and it was on the board that it's not good for your mental health in the way that it can...

It's bad for your mental health in the way that it can possibly damage your eyes and it's not healthy for you.

It discouraged me... it could warn you that it can be bad for you.

School D: Year 8: 2 boys 1 girl

Words and phrases contributed by the students to reflect their experience of ReConnect

Hard, useful, interesting

Interesting, hard, useful

Interesting, fun, different

This group focused on two aspects of their experience: their response to finding how much time they and their peers spent on the internet; how different the ReConnect programme was from their usual IT lessons.

It was interesting to see how many people stayed on their phone and not communicating with people.

It was interesting that loads of people spend so much time on the internet and stuff and it's just better not to because you miss out on time with people and...

I learnt that I shouldn't spend a lot of time on my phone and spend more time socialising with people.

I learnt how much time I spend on the internet which is too much.

I put "interesting", I put "fun" and it's "different" to any other lessons.

It was interesting that we learnt stuff about it.

We learnt about how to keep our profile safe so people we don't know can't look at our pictures and everything.

Well, I mean "interesting" by – we learned interesting stuff about it and how to keep ourselves safe online.

It was different to all the other lessons that we've done. Different to every ICT lesson.

Making the poster and stuff was the best and fun. You could work together with people or you could do it on your own if you wanted. I worked with some people. Well, we were researching stuff and finding out some more stuff to put on the poster.

I liked debating. Debating because there was a couple of groups were debating – it would be online is an all right thing and then the other group were debating – well it's not useful to you.

The crossing the line game. Well, we all stood up and then, because we didn't have enough room we sat down if we did it or not. It was surprising to see how many people sat down for the questions on how long you spend time on your phone. I was amazed to see people spending a lot of time on their phones.

Summary

The striking thing when considering these responses is the similarities between schools in very different locations and with a varied intake of students. Students in five of the six schools chose words to indicate that the programme had made them think, provided them with new ideas and experiences: eye-opening, mind-opening, perspective-changing, enlightening. The word 'eye-opening' was selected by at least one student in four of the schools. In general what had opened their eyes was not the information provided by the programme but the experience of finding out how much time they and their peers spent using different kinds of digital devices. Many students thought that this had changed their view and in some cases their behaviour.

Students in all schools, including the one where response to the programme was generally negative, said the programme was 'interesting'. In some cases this interest was expressed as 'enjoyable', 'surprising'. In the main the interest was also created by experiences which revealed aspects of their digital behaviour to themselves and others. However there were a few students whose reflections on programme involved feelings of 'guilt', and made them 'worried'.

Another group of words found across three schools was about 'challenge', finding something 'difficult'. This was invariably related to the pledge to disconnect. Some people found this easy, but far more 'struggled'. However this was, for most, an 'enjoyable' or 'hopeful' struggle.

In three schools the students remarked on how 'different' the programme was; they felt positive about how they were learning. In two of these schools the programme was located in specific curriculum areas: Humanities and IT. Most of the IT students found the group work and creative activities developed by staff and based on the programme very enjoyable. In the third school the programme was taken by a small group of selected students in a workshop format.

The discussions of words in some cases led students to make links with the content of the scheme of work; in the main what was recalled was one or two videos and activity where they were physically involved and active.

This focus group activity in some cases led to the students becoming involved in discussion of paradoxical concepts provoked by the programme, such as freedom and control, interesting and boring, enjoyable and hard, outside and inside, in relation to their experience and perceptions of technology use. There was ample evidence that young people can be thoughtful, reflective and insightful about the digital world and in some cases understood its complexity and could move beyond their own immediate experience of it.

This analysis indicates that the programme provoked a complex and nuanced range of responses. Overall it appears to have had a positive impact on a majority of students in these focus groups.

A strong finding emerging from this analysis and analysis of other information we collected is the central importance to ‘mind-opening’ of students logging time they actually spend on digital devices. The information we gathered in the interview and focus groups suggest that this was the activity which had most impact on their thinking. For many students this was the trigger to making them more reflective about their device use and in some cases taking action unrelated to the disconnect challenge. It seemed also to be one factor in determining if they attempted disconnect.

7 Reconsidering time spent with and without devices

This section begins with a close look at what young people told us, at the outset of the project, when interviewed in their schools, about *what they thought they might do* if they weren't using their devices, or *how they imagined they would feel*.

We then turn to what they told us about the experience of being without their devices, first illustrating young people's responses to the question *Did anything surprise you about the time off devices?* posed in the ReConnect survey, then showing what young people who took up the 'pledge' week told us about their experience.

As has been clear throughout, students' experience of and engagement in the project was highly diverse. We are able to illustrate this diversity through a series of vignettes – produced from a sample of the 37 one-to-one interviews that we held with students. The examples are chosen in order to represent typologies of participants in the ReConnect programme – young people who are low, medium and high users of technology; and they vary from interested and receptive to the challenge of reconsidering their use of technologies, to unimpressed by the programme and its aims.

7.1 Imagined alternatives to time spent on screen-based devices

What do young people think they would be doing without their devices? In this section of the report we look closely at what young people told us about *what they thought they might do* if they weren't using their devices, or *how they imagined they would feel*.

A frequent comment, given in focus groups and interviews, was that experiencing boredom and the need for distraction were reasons that young people turned to devices. It was unsurprising to hear young people tell us that they thought that spending time without them might turn out to be boring.

In an interview:

Interviewer: Right, that's interesting where you say being bored, so feeling bored you would kind of instinctively move towards your iPad or your 'phone.

Girl: Yes, when say I'm not doing anything, it would kind of like 'oh what can I do, oh I'll go on my iPad or I'll go on my 'phone'

The following discussion between four students took place during a focus group held before the ReConnect programme in their school:

Girl 1: Yeah, I like to be distracted. I will be in my room on my phone and my brothers will come in and annoy me but sometimes I don't like it, I just want to be left alone. But, sometimes I do like it that if my brothers are not there and I am in the house by myself I get bored like, there is nothing to do, nothing to distract me.

Girl 2: I think because phones were introduced, they feel the need, that if you are bored, the first thing you do is pick up a phone. Yeah. And, I think we need a solution for that.

Boy 1: But, think about it. Let me tell you this, think of it. Remember when you guys said that your phone can what's it called? You will be bored, so you use your phone. But, at one point you are going to get bored with your phone, and then what are you going to do now?

Girl 1: Yeah, but you can't get bored with your phone.

Boy 2: There's so much stuff on the phone.

Girl 2: You can't get bored, you can communicate, you can download games, play games, you can socialise like through videos, all this and that, but you will never get bored with your phone.

Boy 1: You are going to get bored at one point.

Other references to using devices as a ready form of entertainment or distraction in response to boredom included:

if I was sitting outside waiting for something, then that's the only time I'd really go on it/ playing the game to stop being bored/ It's a bit of, like, if you're bored you'll go on your phone/ If I'm bored, I'll go on my phone/ when I'm bored, I probably go online/ Yeah, but you can't get bored with your phone/ Being like bored, makes you want to watch some videos/entertainment is what we want the most; we want to be amused, we don't want to be bored when we come home, because most students find their schools boring,

The opportunity that technologies give people to reduce boredom in their lives was, as one student pointed out, something that is shared across the generations.

You can't get bored, you can communicate, you can download games, play games, you can socialise like through videos, all this and that, but you will never get bored with your phone. Yeah. Have you ever been sat there, just doing nothing, just bored, and you need something to do? That's what my granddad is, when he goes on his computer.

Given their perceived value for staving off boredom, it is unsurprising that ideas about time spent without devices were, for some, associated with the probability of having 'nothing to do'

...do you reckon they'd be able to do it without going insane, sort of thing, without a phone?" and everyone was just like, "No, I'd just get super bored and nothing to do, with spare time"....

...if I had my phone taken off me, today, for a month, I would live. I'd be a bit bored, obviously, but I'd be perfectly fine...

When young people were talking about what time spent without their devices might involve, another dominant theme that ran alongside *not having anything else to do*, was *going out*. This was particularly striking as the leading 'imagined alternative'.

Several students were quite explicit about the alternatives: you could be at home, using your device or doing homework, you could be 'out and doing things'; or you could be bored.

Yeah, I got a scooter, and if it's sunny outside, I'll go to the skate park, but if it's not, I'll stay inside, and my parents are fine with that, but they're not fine with the amount of time that I stay on it. But I can't find anything else to do.

Because sometimes, when I don't have homework to do, and I'm not going out on that night, I just find it really boring.

Well, instead of like ... if I am at home and it is like raining, like on a Saturday in the winter, you can't really go outside and you can't really play, and there is obviously a big gap in the weekend where if I am not going out, like with the family or just at home, it is something for me to do.

It was also possible to get bored at home despite having a device to hand

...if you end up sitting at home, just being on your phone, life can become quite boring, and it's a lot better to go out and do stuff...

...quite often get bored if I use my phone because I don't really have much I like to do on there..

Perhaps in sympathy with the notion of 'reconnecting', much of the things that young people said about 'doing things' alluded to the world outside the house as the place where potentially interesting, useful activities were to be found. In the following extract from a discussion, the alternatives to using phones are listed as *exercising, enjoying oneself outside, being useful and being constructive*

Because, I think that people, young children and young adults, are on their phones too much, and instead of going outside and exercising or enjoying themselves outside in the park, they are just on their phones, sitting on the sofa and not really making themselves as useful as they could be, or doing anything constructive with their lives.

One student painted an idyllic picture of being outside without devices, in contrast to being 'indoors on technology'

Yeah. Going out, it's like, it's freedom, really. You know, we're caught up in this bubble of virtual reality and technology, but when you go outside it's free. There's no... Nothing's stopping you from doing what you want, but there are no... If you want to put down your phone, you don't have to be on your phone when you're outside. It's just the free will to me.

Making sense of ReConnect's purpose in terms of *wasted time* versus *being outside*, another student said:

Well, I don't think the Reconnect project is just to, like, keep you from using, like, technology entirely. I think it, like, it's just making you realise just how much time you're wasting on technology, so you're more aware of, like, how long you're spending on it, and that way, you'll be able to, like, limit your time on technology, so then you can, like, do more, like, outdoor activities, instead of, like, just staying indoors

This was typical of numerous other responses to the question, asked early during focus group discussions, about what participants thought the ReConnect study was about. Another representative example is:

I think the balance of technology and the outside world would be that you can have the technology when you are not going to be outside, and you have to be inside. But, if you have the chance of being outside you should go for it

In this, some young people seemed to be alluding to *other peoples' stories* of their youth:

Like if you look at what kids did like 50 years ago, they went outside, climbed trees, and played with their friends, and now today they sit on Xbox and play Call of Duty or whatever

The notion that technology was somehow preventing young people from going outside was picked up and queried by one student. Alongside this she expressed frustration, through quoting a familiar injunction, with adults' efforts in trying to make young people talk to

people around them (presumably, in place of talking to friends on their smartphones). She equated the ReConnect project as being part of this general adult campaign:

Or, what I want it to be about, instead of it being about, “Oh, don’t use technology because it’s stopping you from talking to the people that are near you.” It should be... Sometimes some people have prevented from going outside, but then sometimes you get some people that... They’ll make plans using technology to go outside, so it’s not necessarily saying, it’s stopping you.

Well, when we think of technology we often associate it with being inside and sort of disconnecting yourself from everything that’s outside, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that when you’re indoors you’re using technology, like you said, you can still do other things while indoors.

7.2 The experience of spending time without devices

The responses to the survey question “*Did anything surprise you about the time off devices?*” showed that what was surprising for many of those who spent time off their devices was the very possibility that they could cut back on screen time and even that it could be enjoyable

I didn’t miss it as much as I thought/ It was easier to stop using my phone than I anticipated/ It was easier than I expected/ I found it a lot easier and more beneficial than I thought I was going to / How much I didn’t need it / I found out that I seem to time pass without screen time/ I enjoyed it more than I expected / That I can do it/ It was surprisingly easy and calming I seemed happier/ It was easier than I expected

On the other hand, a few young people’s surprise was in finding that doing without their devices was much more difficult than they had thought it would be and were unhappy with the experience.

It made me unhappy / I thought it was going to be bad; it was even worse. /It was worse than I thought it would be/ I couldn’t talk to my friends/ I lost all my streaks

Some answered the question with reports that they had discovered that they had had more time available and could get more done, while some commented that it had encouraged them to be more organised. Examples were:

I got more done in a day than I thought I would / I focused more on homework and had a bit more time on my hands. I didn’t ‘dilly dally’ as much either / How much time it can take up/

Activities which the students reported they had spent more time doing (and were surprised at doing) included: homework, time outside, time with pets and siblings, board games

That I managed to do all my homework in one night / I spent longer on homework
It allowed me to do more active things outside school/ I spent more time outside/ I ended up going outside more than I did before/ I played more board game/ I did a lot more with my pets/ I spent more time playing with my siblings

Of the expressions of surprise, one related to sleep and one to discovering an interest in the news

I slept more than I thought possible/ I didn’t realise I was so interested in the news

Some responses to the question were reflective, but not positive

How hard it was not to go on or device / I felt a lot more awkward

Of the students involved in one-to-one interviews that were organised with young people in schools, only a proportion had taken up the challenge to switch off or reduce their use. Some of the information from these interviews and from focus groups does, however, give a richer illustration of their experience, their thoughts, and what they found and intend to carry forward.

One of those who had taken up the challenge to ‘disconnect’ for a week, was Harrison, whose pledge involved time limits suggested by his mother. In a one-to-one interview he provided a reflective account of his experience:

In today’s society, people go on technology, in my personal opinion, far too much. So, with the ReConnect project, I thought... with, like, limiting people’s time, you could make more friends. Like, learn new things. Like, you could do activities that you’ve never done before. So, I went home straightaway, told my mum about it and my mum... What my mum said, she says, “For this week, I’m not going to force you to, but I’ll remind you to, like, limit time on your phone,” because I go on my phone quite a lot. My bedtime’s 9 o’clock, so she said, “Stop, like, don’t go on anything, like, just play with your little brother, or, like read a book or something for an hour before your bedtime.” And that’s what I did for that week. And, I’ll be honest with you, I don’t do that no more!

At first, it was, like, quite boring, I’ll be honest. But then I got used to it and I found some other stuff to do. Like, I’d read a book with my brother. I’d, like... we’d just play really. It was quite weird because... I do read books, but I read them on my, like, phone and it was, like, nice just to not constantly tap a screen all the time and just like constantly- My mum was very supportive about it. Like, she agreed with it because, my mum’s constantly nagging me and my brother. She’ll be, like, “Oh, come on! Get off your, like, phone,” or something. So, yeah. It was nice actually.

When I was, like, away from my phone, like, on car journeys where we go somewhere, I’d always bring my phone to listen to music or, like, watch YouTube, but I thought to myself, “Oh, I’m not going to bring my phone today now. I’ll see what’s it’s like.” And me and my brother just sat in the car and just talked for, like, an hour-and-a-half at one point. (laughter) I know it seems odd. Like, yeah, we just sat and talked and, like, to be fair, I found it quite nice, like, talking to someone-

Yeah, I think it’s, like, opened up a lot of, like fun stuff for me because I’d wanted to go paintballing for ages and then I finally got to do it on Saturday! So, that’s like, an activity that I did because I could have just stayed at home really, but I wanted to. All in all, I have cut down, I personally think, from my phone. And I still have, like, my friends. Where I live, there’s a massive, really big field next to it, so I just go and play on that. But like, if you’d asked me, like, a couple of months ago. “Would you rather go out on the field and play, like, football, or would you rather stay in on your phone?” I’d have said, “Stay in on my phone.”

In some interview and focus groups, young people’s responses indicated an increased awareness and a shift in mindset in relation to technology, which the young people in question attributed to participation in the ReConnect programme. Two students in particular described this.

Adria goes to an all girls school and is in year 8. She is in a class in which very few took up the challenge to disconnect. She pledged not to use certain apps like FaceTime, which she was using up to two hours at a time, and not to use her phone after 10pm.

I'm glad I gave it a try because it was worth it...I had more time for homework, more time to go and sit outside, which was actually really nice and I got more sleep and felt more organised afterwards as well.'

Although Adria had talked to her friends about ReConnect, she said she didn't speak to her family about it. During the week she wasn't using her devices she also didn't do more things with her family. When she spent more time outside, it was in the local park with her friends. Her online friends from her own school and from other schools had helped her with the pledge, after she told them what she was planning to do and explained that she wouldn't be as active or visible online:

They were quite cool with it but they didn't really understand why we were doing it because they haven't done anything like that at their school.

She said that this helped because

They weren't trying to talk to me (...) Now I still think that phones are a good thing and that social media's a good thing to connect with people, but we should try to be a bit more connected with the outside world.'

Dan told us that spending a few days without going on games had made him more aware of how much could otherwise be done in the time that he typically spent on them. He said:

When I've come in from school sometimes I go upstairs and go on my games and that and not see my mum or owl until about 9 o'clock at night.

He worked out that he spent four or six hours every day on his Play Station.

Time goes really quick when... it doesn't seem like a long time when you're playing on it but when you look back it is a long time.

After five days without it he said:

It surprised me because you could go like to different places in the time of four to six hours and go there and come back.

The extent to which it had been easy to 'come off' seemed to vary according to the perception of what might happen to the young person's relationship to their social network. This was particularly prominent for some of the girls we talked to in a focus group, who were fully aware of the importance for them and their peer group of being able to keep in contact with their friends:

Lizzie: Me and my friend did it together and she ended up going on it on the first night, and she was like, "I think we should make it that we can go on from seven o'clock onward". I think she talks to people who don't go to this school a lot, and I think she feels the need to.

Jamila: A lot of my friends said it wouldn't be that hard but they just didn't see the point in doing it because if they weren't on social media then they might feel out of place and they wouldn't know what's going on

Ness: I think I'd still go on it but not as much as I used to do. Yeah, because like if all your friends are on their phones and stuff it's tempting and, I don't know, it's just hard.

A similar pressure existed for boys:

Evan: Like when I'm on Xbox I'm in like a party or something talking to loads of people and I'm like, 'Oh I want to go outside now'. Like, 'Oh no, don't go out, stay on this game' and stuff.

The following comment from one girl describes her discovery that stepping out of regular use of her phone, reduces the activity that makes it compelling:

I found that when, like, I wasn't on my phone, I didn't actually have that many notifications, so, basically, when I'm on my phone, I'm texting people so they have to respond to me. So I'm making it happen, whereas when I wasn't on my phone I'd probably have one notification and it would just be somebody sending their streaks, like nobody actually, it's sad, but no-one was actually, like, trying to contact me, but you know, normally I'm contacting them and then they're having to respond, so that's starting this conversation which makes me want to be attached to the phone.

Another girl noticed that she could easily remove herself to a certain extent by shifting her own patterns of use, which formerly had closely followed those of her friends:

It, like, made me realise that, I know this sounds so stupid, but my friends don't need to know everything I do. I'm texting them and, like, I don't need to be with them or, like, texting them, like, every second of the day, and that there is a world outside your phone. Like, one day, if you drop your phone in the toilet, I don't know, and it breaks or something, there is a world outside your phone, so you will be able to go on without it.

7.2.1 Finding other things to do

Around thirty students involved in focus groups and interviews spoke of shifting at least some of their everyday activity from on-line to be more involved in an off-line world. We have extracted what they told us and listed it below, in order to give an indication of the variety of activities that those who reduced their screen-time had chosen to do.

Book reading and drawing were frequently mentioned:

Philippa: I tried to just reduce time, so rather than being bored and going on my iPad or on my 'phone I tried to do something else. When say I'm not doing anything, it would kind of like 'oh what can I do, oh I'll go on my iPad or I'll go on my 'phone' I actually did a bit of reading (laughing) which I haven't done in a very long time, which I did actually enjoy. Reading, just sitting downstairs with my family, going in the garden, stuff like that. I read 'A Monster Calls', I'm still reading that. Yes, I am trying to do more reading because I feel like the project has made me aware of the fact that I probably am spending a bit too much time on [my phone], so I need to say to myself 'right, that's enough time, now you read your book and you go to bed.', rather than going on it.

Deanna: I went outside a bit more. I did quite a bit of drawing, and I read more, because I read a lot anyway, but I spent more time doing other things.

Jacob: I got a book and read it.

Cathy: Like, I tried turning my phone off after... I'd check my phone and then if after like five, ten minutes I'd turn it off and then I'd like go outside but say it were raining or something I'd read a book. It was good. (Cathy had earlier told us that she very rarely reads books)

Stan: Well, instead of going on my phone, I'd go out with friends, and stuff like that – draw, stuff like that, really.

Jacob: I just didn't play games that much. For the past few days, I didn't play a game. There wasn't really much difference; I just found something else to do. Go outside, play with my dog, read a book! I don't really read books, so it was... A book about a post-apocalyptic world.

Ahmad: It's pretty hard at the moment because I'm very used to using my phone, like when I come back from school the first thing I do is go on my phone, like just watch movies, talk to my friends, play games, go on Instagram, Snapchat and like, ...but now you have to resort to like sleeping, going out to play, like doing chores, many things, I have to do many different things. What's been the most difficult part of giving it up? Like me having to like improvise when I get home because like I find it hard to find things to do. I can go out with my friend, literally just go outside, go out with a friend but like go to the library, study, read books because I have been reading more books at home and like learning words. I started and like I've recently just finished my Percy Jackson book because like I've always been... I love Percy Jackson. I can't remember the title but it was very interesting because it stopped me using my phone but I spend more time reading and seeing the bigger world.

Liam told us that he played a card game with his father

‘and it was really fun’

It's become a regular thing on weekends.

He was quite happy, thinking... he may have thought at that point that I'm connecting with him for a bit instead of going on my device.’

There were also accounts of having more free time and spending more time on homework

Adrian: Well, on the train I usually read the news anyway, so I haven't really changed what my usual routine is because I don't really use technology on the train, but I've just felt I've had a lot more free time at home.

Julie: I just gave it up during school time because I do use it sometimes, but not that often. Like I don't really use my phone at all. I just use it for like- Like emergencies and stuff like that, so I just gave it up for during school time. I did a lot more reading and I spent a lot more time on doing me homework because normally I don't rush with homework, but I'd like... I do it quite quick, but like I like spent more time on it and I read more books.

Tom: I did similar to what Julie did, gave it up during school time and like... I gave it up from like the bus and that, because on the bus, I don't really go on social media, I listen to music, but sometimes it's interesting to listen to the world around you rather than the music. I've always looked out the window. I never... not really gone on social media, but it was just listening to the world around me.

Barney: It gave me more time to do homework, so I definitely could consider that, but I'm quite lucky because the area that I live in has some a lot of forest and basically got natural things to go out and see, so I found myself going out to appreciate those things more.

Others talked about becoming more engaged in physical activity. One boy, who we will call Sam, told us:

I tried to improve my fitness levels because I play football and sports a lot. I just cut a few hours shorter like. From going on. A few days I stopped me like ... well, going off a bit shorter but then like on weekend and all that I just did stop. Yeah, because like you could go outside and do stuff, than you could do like on your phone, so you could go with some mates and a football.

We also heard about spending more time with family, including pets

Rhiannon: I tried to come off at night and like go and sit with my family in the living room and talk to them.

Jenny: When I wasn't on it I focused more on work and just went downstairs and played with my dog and just messed about. I love playing with my dog. She's really cute.

Amina: I got to fit more stuff into my evening. I did some baking with my sister and made some brownies for friend's birthday yesterday.

Pearl: I've set a timer for when my laptop shuts down automatically, so I get an hour on weekdays and two hours on weekends. I got to spend more time with my dad. My mum was still on her phone. We went on like drives and that. We went to the caravan the one weekend, at the weekend. We spent time in the garden, like doing gardening and that. It wasn't painful giving up.

Elaine: I tried not to like all the time constantly go on it, like I tried to take my dog on a walk and like go outside and play with my friends.

Vik: I gave up me Xbox. It was like easy. It was actually a realisation how easy it was. I threw the ball for the dog a lot more times.

Carter: I just spent time with family and went out and everything. They were just glad that I'm spending more time with them and stuff instead of being on my phone all the time

Lea: I just cut down the time I spent on my phone. One to two hours. It wasn't hard because I just spent time with my family instead. My parents were happy that I cut time down on my phone and spending more time with them.

Johnnie: I spent time with my mum and my dad because I don't really spend that much time with them. I felt a lot better on the inside, yes. They were amazed that I'm spending a lot more time with them.

Kezia: I tried leaving it out for the week and leaving it for the weekend. I helped my mum look after my niece and nephew. That there's more things to do in life than just sitting around and...

Jonny: Well, when I get home, I usually go on my phone onto YouTube and if me mom shouts for me to come down and help and do something all the time I say I'll be down in a minute, and I just stay on the phone for a bit longer. Well, if she shouted me down, I just went down and helped.

Dolores: I just spent more time with my mum. Like, usually I go straight to my room and like, all I would really come out for is if I was like cooking, I would cook a meal and then still go back to my room. And, I feel like I just spoke to my mum a lot more than what I did when I was like...She kind of like clicked on to what I was doing..It was sort of like, she just looked and was like, 'You haven't been in your room as much.' and I was like, 'Oh yeah, there's nothing to do'.

Andrew: I done it. I am still doing it. I gave up my phone. Like, I just don't really use it. Like, I will take it occasionally but I don't really, right now I don't even have it on me as we are speaking, my mum has it. And, it really helped me because I have found out stuff that I didn't even know myself. I knew my mum was a funny person, but when I came off the phone, I knew my mum was a really funny person, the amount of jokes (laughing). My mum is a really funny person. I knew she was funny, but I didn't think she was that funny if you know what I mean? Me and my mum always did have that jokey relationship, you know. But, now I am off my phone like, I really got to really communicate with her, if you know what I mean. She was like, her attitude got a bit happy in a way because like, I was always communicating with her.

Because, if she was in the kitchen, I was in the kitchen helping her, because I didn't have my phone I would go like, 'Oh yeah mum do you need anything?' because she was in a room by herself, because my dad was out working. So, yeah just certain things like that, it will just make her a bit happy if you know what I mean?

Kiara: I reduced my screen time by 70%, I think yeah, 60%. Well, I came off my phone at about eight at night, and I didn't use it until the morning time, when I was getting ready to go to school. And, I think like, I definitely had a better rest because my mind wasn't distracted. I felt like I socialised with my family more, because I realised I was like more up in their faces and we were realising that like, we wanted to just have a nice family conversation. My mum was like, 'What's wrong with you?' She thought there was something wrong with me or like my phone had broke or something, she thought I was hiding the phone. She was pleased.

Jibril: I don't know, it just felt a bit weird without my phone, I didn't know what to do like, it was so weird. But, then more time I was going outside playing football and watching a little bit of TV and then go to bed, and then yeah. I was getting more sleep which was good. I am surprised of how much I get along with my little sister, even though the age gap is nine years, I realised that when I came off my phone, playing with her as a four year old, I actually enjoyed it. Like, we had a treasure hunt, we were just walking around the house and I realised like, 'I don't need my phone to enjoy myself'. I thought, 'She is a baby, I am not going to enjoy that.' but I actually enjoyed it and I like spending time with my sister now.

Natalie: I think my family quite enjoy [the cutting back]. I didn't tell them. kind of kept it quiet. They like it because for example in my room, I clean my room maybe once a week and now I have started cleaning much more, and I also clean the kitchen and some other things. I went for a walk with my grandma yesterday.. My family think I am quite addicted to my phone. But honestly I don't really care if I have social media. I just use it to look at things that are quite enjoyable. I wouldn't say I'm addicted, not really, because I like, if I could I would like to walk instead.

Tanaka: I've found other things to do like help out my mum in the kitchen or go out with my uncle and my brother.

The following discussion took place in a focus group at School B amongst young people in year 9 and 10

Tim: I, myself, have become, like, more aware of how much I'm using my phone. I'll admit, at one point, during, like, the week, I did go back to using my phone again. But after that, I just realised, like, how much I'm using it. So, I tried again to, like, disconnect from it.

Michael: When I first heard about the disconnect project, I just thought - this is just the way for the teachers to get us off technology, so that we go to bed earlier, we think more, and we do better in school. But, now that I've actually taken part, I've realised that what they're doing is they're trying to show us how your life could be, if you weren't on technology so much, and how much more you could accomplish. Well, they'd like to take our phones, and show us how useful we could be without them, and I thought, well, I never really use my phone anyway, so, I'll give in to them, and I'll see what it's like. And then, I was going to go home, and go straight on all the other technology, but then I thought, this is just cheating. No, and because of this, I've done more homework, and I've got other things that I might have worried about in the Easter holiday out the way, so I don't have to, and I can just relax.

Evan: Like, when I was doing the disconnect, well, because my phone's been broken, I was given a replacement phone; just like one of the £10 ones, where you actually have the buttons and that, and it was only to be used for, like, emergencies, and it's not nice to get it out in front of people. It's like having a brick in your pocket. And, like, it hasn't really been that limiting, cause I've just been going out with my Dad, cause I don't really connect much with him. Like, I've found out what my dad's really interested in. We live in the same house but he's, normally, down in the living room, like, watching telly most of the time. I'd normally be in my bedroom on my Playstation, or on my phone. Like, it's been better to connect with him,

being, like, a bit more open, like. The other day, we went hill boarding in the woods. Like, the past few weeks, my mum's been telling my dad to step up from what he's been, cause he's normally, like, couch potato.

Sian: Well, at the start of the project, I, sort of, had the same thoughts as Michael, because I didn't really want to come off my technology for the week. And during the entire six weeks, I kept on thinking about it, and I thought that it might actually be a good change. And get to be a nice change of pace. And I was actually looking after my auntie's dog, Rolo, and when I had my technology, I never really used to take her out for walks much, and basically, without the technology, I've been able to do that, and I've went to my nan's, and I've done other stuff with my family, that I wouldn't normally do, if I had technology. I did enjoy it more than I actually thought I would.

Some mentioned sleep:

Leonora: Usually I like to go on social media before I go to sleep, so I went to bed earlier than I usually did. And, I spent more time with like family. It was good, because we got to like, talk to each other about how we felt and stuff like that. I usually, I have dance every week so I tended to practice more.

Melina: I slept a lot better, when I didn't use my computer because it didn't keep me awake to want to be on it.

Dan, who pledged not to go on his Play Station after school or at the weekends, and kept it up for five days, said:

It were good because I just did other activities and that what I like never done before and went out. I've been spending all time downstairs with my family and going out and playing football with my mates. It was good to start with and then once I started getting used to it, it became like hard to stay away because I didn't see my friends and that nor like heard from them.

The theme of going out more came up amongst other aspects that young people had noticed, including this boy, who specifically organised himself to being out with his friends for longer in order not to get bored – presumably because he expected lack of access to his devices to bring about boredom:

Saul: I just started going outside and playing with my friends. I go out quite a lot, but I went out for longer, just so I didn't get as bored. I didn't get very bored when I'm not on my phone or on my PlayStation.

It would be unfair to give the impression that all of those who participated in the 'disconnect' week discovered advantages of time spent without technology. The following extract from an interview with a boy from School B, who had given his phone to the head teacher for some days, illustrates some of the practical reasons why young people might be reluctant to spend part of their lives without their devices

It was hard obviously trying to find entertainment. It made it a lot harder to communicate with people, for example I get the train so getting the train and then saying what time I'm going to be there, getting timings and stuff like that, it was just awful. There were times when I was sat outside waiting for an hour or so because obviously I couldn't communicate with anyone to tell them that I was at the train station.

While we heard many delightful reports of rediscovery of the delights of face-to-face communication with families, this was not universal. The following student had made an impressive effort, which failed:

So, I mostly just felt really bored and when I tried to talk to my parents about new things that I learn from my books, like DNA strands and stuff like, they weren't even bothered.

Some had simply got bored

I was hopeful that it wasn't going to be boring just sitting at home doing nothing. Hopeful, it was kind of boring, and isolated.

I felt strange because I didn't know what else to do. Like, when I was sat in the car, I would just sit there, and then it was really boring because I didn't want to go on my phone.

7.3 Diversity in students' interpretations, experience and responses to the programme

In this section, we illustrate a sample of participating young people's experiences of the programme in the form of small vignettes, using extracts from interviews in which they describe their background, interest and experience. These examples have been chosen because they represent the diversity of backgrounds and responses to the programme, and make it possible to relate the interpretation and the impact of the programme to the wider context of the young person's experience.

Lucy: a relatively low user of technology

Lucy is in Year 9 at School A, an all-girls school. Her description of her own and other's use is a story of the integration of technology into everyday life. The use of technology enabled her father to spend some of his work time at home rather than being away; she and her mother are able to keep in touch with significant friends. She herself found devices useful for looking up information, both for schoolwork and for leisure, and for taking photographs and playing music. She seemed to have a strong notion of 'balance' in the sense of communication through face to face interaction versus via devices. Her description included an allusion to some discussion within the family about the impact of technology on sleep and Lucy had taken up some advice that it's best not to use screens close to bedtime; apart from this, control didn't appear to be an issue in her family.

She told us that her father was on the phone quite a lot and has a lot of conference calls but this was because he worked from home, meaning that all of his use was related to his business. She didn't think anyone in her family used their phone much. Her sister was an artist and uses the computer to draw; meanwhile, her mother wasn't a frequent user:

She FaceTimes sometimes which I think is quite good, because it's a good way to keep in touch; but she doesn't do it for too long – only about 15 minutes a day, I guess.'

Lucy herself had a smartphone and a laptop. Of her own use she said:

To be honest, I don't really feel like I use my phone that much. I only really use it, like, to ask people or if I'm curious. If I'm home and I'm like "Oh my God, what's the homework?" I'll text a friend or something, and ask them; or if you're just out and about, and you're having a debate with someone, and you're like, "Oh, no! I thought it was the chicken first, I thought it was the egg first," and you're like, "Oh, I'll Google it"

She thought Snapchat was really good for planning things with friends; but she didn't like having long conversations with people online:

I prefer talking to people in real life – but planning is easier online, it's more... just, get to the point.

Lucy said she liked to take photographs with her phone when she was on holiday, 'so you can remember them.' She had an Instagram account and sometimes posted holiday pictures or looks at what other people have posted; in describing these to us she wanted to make it very clear that everything is set to private. She doesn't play on games on computers,

because I don't really like them. I listen to music quite a lot - but I wouldn't be looking at my screen; I'd put it over in the side of the room while I'm doing something else.

Overall Lucy thought she spends more time doing school work than using digital devices. Her laptop is for school work but homework is mainly 'written stuff' which she said was good because she thinks laptops and internet access can be unreliable.

I don't really like computers (laughing) that much. They can be quite scary, so...I'm not very good at computers.

During the ReConnect programme, Lucy kept a one-week log of her time on devices and was not surprised at the outcome. She also made a pledge for disconnect week.

I decided to stop online shopping. I don't really like online shopping – I never buy anything, but sometimes I like to just look at what fashion has come out; but I just decided, "I will try to not do that," and I found it very easy.

Lucy didn't think that her parents attempted to control her time on devices.

I feel like, if they saw me go on my phone excessively, they'd probably say something; but I don't feel like I do, so I don't feel like they say anything. I just prefer not to do it.

My dad did tell me one time – and I knew this beforehand – if you go on your phone too much, near to when you go to bed, then it can affect how you sleep; and because sometimes I don't sleep very well, that's why I don't do it... Better safe than sorry, really.

She said she thought that it is a good thing to talk about controlling digital use and having a balance.

Because, if not, you can end up living too much life in your phone. In the evenings, it's quite nice to go out with your friends, rather than just sitting on your phone and talking to them... If you end up sitting at home, just being on your phone, life can become quite boring, and it's a lot better to go out and do stuff.

Lucy told us that she thought that projects like ReConnect would be really helpful to people who use phones too much.

I can see how it is a good idea, and I guess it's just saying, like, "I need to stop going on my phone as much as I do"

Katrina: integrating technology into an active life

Katrina was in year 8 at School C, fully conversant with social media, and might be described as a 'high' user. However, the information she gave us revealed the complexity and variety of her use, its integration into her personal network and activities, which included music, boxing, swimming, netball, and horse-riding.

Her use of the smartphone is primarily for keeping in touch with other people, using social media, and for games. From the account she gives, it appeared that her parents are comfortable with the *quantity* of use: they intervened a little (checking at bedtime) while at the same time sufficiently anxious about the *nature* of her use (looking to see what she has been doing). We learned that for her family, all of whom have mobile phones, the parents used guidelines rather than set up controls; for example, there was a convention for not using technology at mealtimes, and Katrina thought that it was appropriate for parents to set boundaries. Her use of the smartphone was, in her words ‘short and snappy’; longer periods of use would be for watching films. Outside of school, and school-related clubs, she was busy with looking after and riding horses, and with preparation for a music exam.

Katrina described her family as ‘all Mac users’. Everyone has a mobile except Katrina's four-year old brother:

My dad has like two phones, one for family and one for business. My mum uses like Facebook and WhatsApp and all that all the time, like Facebook Messenger and stuff all the time. I don't use Facebook Messenger. I have a Mac, I have an iPad, I have an iPad Mini, I have a phone and I have an iPod. But they're like things I've had over the years. I got my iPod when I was nine and then I just had that for a while and then when I was ten for Christmas I got my iPad and then when I moved into secondary school I got my MacBook and I got my phone because I got like a printer as well so for like stuff for schoolwork and things. In general the laptop is for school and the phones is for personal use.

We interviewed Katrina before the school had started the three weeks of intensive work on ReConnect in the Humanities curriculum. She began by telling us about her smartphone. The first thing she had done when she got it was download social media:

...like apps and stuff. Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, all these kind of things. Because like my friends used it so it was another way of like talking I guess. They've all got phones too. They've always had phones since I've known them. One of my friends got an iPhone 4 when she was in Year 3 but that was because her parents divorced and stuff so she could contact both of them. I have an iPhone 6s but she has a 5s now so...

Does it make a difference which one you have?

Like I guess you can use them in a different way, like the camera's better and they're like different models they can do different things, so like with a 6s you can do like live pictures which is where you like take a picture and then it moves a bit I guess whereas like phones before can't do that. And also with a 5s because I used to have a 5s it has thumbprint and so does 6s and all that so you don't have to put your password in all the time, so if you don't want people like knowing your password and stuff you have a thumbprint and then you like push your thumb on it ...– but I have a password as well and my friends will have their fingerprint on my phone and I have the same because like we trust each other.

I mostly play games, text my parents. Slither.io, Hop, PrankDial, this jigsaw game which is really addictive, Bookcraft, Crossword Puzzle, Heads Up, Episode, Piano Tiles, Color and then I use things like Tubidy and Apple Music and then I have like Musically, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook. So like I'll get like new games for example and then after I've done that I'll like play them and then if I stop playing them really, I don't really want it taking up all my storage so I just delete it if I don't really like use it. Then I'll play other games and I actually need to clear out all my pictures.

[On Instagram] I chat on like direct message, I comment on photos like nice things like when people tag me and post photos, yeah. Selfies, pictures of me and my friends, like landscape ones because I don't know how they... like I took like a picture of the hills and stuff and I went to the sea and things and I took pictures of that.

We're all private. I follow like people in this school and people from other schools but I generally know who I follow. And I only let people follow me who I like know or are like friends of them so it'll say, it'll like suggest people to follow and it'll say like so many people follow them that I know and then I'll like look at them and see if they look alright and then I'll follow them. I've got like three people who I follow online but that's because my friends, I know them because I went to a different secondary and they went all to the same primary school as me, so there are people that went to my primary that went to like a secondary that's further away, and I'll follow them but I don't know them but my friends know them and like I know that that's safe I guess. I met some for real because there was a party on Friday night and I met loads of them there so...

I wouldn't really say like I have a friendship online, like I have lots of people who follow me and they'll like see my pictures but I wouldn't really say they're in my friendship group. I have like quite a few chats I have, so I've got people that I was friends with in that secondary school I was talking about, I've got people from my area because I swim for my local area so I've got lots of friends from there and then I have like four specific friends, my main group who I hang around with.

Katrina said that it didn't matter to her how many people follow her.

Not really, no. I don't really mind. Not really. I understand some people would want to have loads of followers. Because it like makes you look like popular I guess and it like... I check how many likes I get on my pictures and I check my comments but I don't really check my followers. I just like to know how many I get and I like to know who's liked them, like if they're people I know or not know.'

If Katrina put up a picture that she thought was really good and nobody liked it:

I'd take it down. Yeah, because like... well, it depends, it depends like if it was people that I had no idea and they were like, 'Oh really nice picture' but if it was people that I really liked and they like didn't do anything then... but it would depend what the picture was, if it was a really nice picture of me and my family then I would keep it but if it was like a picture of a landscape then I'd probably just like take it off because that doesn't affect me as a person, like it was nice for me to see but it doesn't really affect me as a person.'

I use WhatsApp but I only use WhatsApp to talk because I have lots of family in other countries and I use WhatsApp to text them and like Messenger on Apple. But like because my gran and all that family are Irish, so all my like great aunts and uncles I always like text them on WhatsApp because I have their numbers but they use WhatsApp a lot so I text them on WhatsApp and I text my mum

When I first got Instagram, which was in Year 7 I'd say I used it all the time but I only really go through like Instagram maybe once a day just to go on it for my feed whereas Snapchat I use that like a lot more and Facebook is probably only like once a day just going through like everyone's feeds to see what's happening. But I'd say like Snapchat because they've got all funny filters I like take pictures of my friends and stuff and I like chat to a lot of people and like my streaks. Streaks. So, basically when you send a snap to someone if each of you send one three days in a row, so it could be anything like a picture of a landscape or some people actually just use like a black picture and it like says streaks and you like send that to loads of people. And then after three days it'll say number three and you want to get as many like numbers, the higher number you get the better. And on the Snapchat you have these like little trophy things that you get if you do certain things, so like, I don't know, like telling someone about Snapchat or like, I don't know, sending so many pictures, getting so many streaks of someone and you also have the amount of points, like the amount of people you text so if you get a certain amount of points on Snapchat then you get like a trophy as well. Well, points is like how many people you talk to in a day so if you send things to five people you get five points. But I don't really like make an effort to get them, they just say oh right, yeah, you've got this and I'll say if I've got say like 100 days of so and so, like I had 100 days for my friend Tanisha last week and I like put that on my Snapchat, I was like 100 days of Tanisha

but... I like streaks, like I like to keep my streaks but other than that, no, like I used to like go through people's My Story and like other people's story.

About her phone Katrina said:

I always have it on me but if I didn't have it for a day or so it wouldn't really affect me.'
She said that nobody controlled her use of her phone, but some monitoring did take place:

No, like my mum does sneak through my phone all the time. All the time and it's really annoying but it's fine, I understand she's protecting me so that's fine. That's the only reason why I'm allowed Snapchat and Facebook. And my mum's on Facebook as well so like – 'Sometimes me and mum have rows a lot and like I had my phone taken off me once for a whole school term. Well, it was six weeks. I was in trouble with mum. Anyway, it wasn't anything to do with social media it was me being cheeky towards her. And I got it back but then like she took it off me again. And I had that gone for like once one week then two weeks then three weeks and it actually didn't affect me in the three weeks. Not really because I made sure that I spent more time with my friends outside of school then because I always... like we always do things after school and as well, you know, I asked them how they were and stuff more I guess than I would at home if you know what I mean? And I have Instagram on my laptop anyway and Snapchat and Facebook so I could do that as well I guess.' '[My parents] say like... so today since I've got a test for example like I have to put my phone downstairs when I go to bed so I'm not on it all night because they want me to get to sleep without my phone but, not [normally] – Well, it depends how late it was. If it was like ten and they saw I wasn't asleep they'd be like, 'Katrina, hand over your phone' and then I'd give it to them or something but ...

If they didn't Katrina thinks she would keep Snapchatting:

Probably, until I actually like fall asleep. Yeah, but I try not to because I need a lot of sleep because I have to wake up early because I have horses. So, I have to wake up at six o'clock every morning to do them, have a shower and then get ready for school. I'd say if I was an addict, like you've said, then my mum would be like, yeah, Katrina you don't really... I actually don't think she would mind but I think if I was on my phone, like I don't use my phone at the dinner table or something, like I always talk to my family but I'd say I use it a lot as well.

When asked about the ReConnect programme, Katrina said:

[I thought it] would have meant, like, 'reconnect with your friends and family', but I don't think that that's what the word 'reconnect' was, because it was more about, like, mobile phone usage, and technology usage, and how you use that, and what you use it – and there was a video of people who did this ReConnect project, and they stopped using their phone for a week, and they said that they didn't use it, and they felt better, because they weren't spending as much time on their phone, and they were doing other things more: outside activities, more hanging around with their friends and stuff. So, maybe if that meant 'reconnect with your friends', but that was only really one video about that – it was more, just, they were saying, like, mobile phone usage, and what can happen if you're on your phone all the time.

We had to create an app. You had to create an internet app that you would use, that you think people would be on a lot... Ours was a teenage dating site. We thought youths might spend a lot of time on that. Then we did a presentation, and we had to show them our app and stuff. Well, we learnt that... He showed us surveys and stuff that he'd got online, and there were things like how much you used technology, and what people used the most of. and we also went on the App Store, and if you go on the App Store on iOS devices, it'll tell you how many people use these things. Our group, we went on our phone – we were allowed to, of course – and we went on the App Store, and we looked at... It is a thing, you tap 'most

popular' and there are all these apps that come up which most people use, and for kids it was games, and for pre-teens, it was games and stuff; and then, for teens, it was social media, weight loss apps, and dating devices. And because it was supposed to be for teenagers ... Yeah, so we did that, because we thought if you are single, maybe you're 15, 16 and you're going to prom, and you want to find someone in, like, to go with, you'd go on that and... Yeah, we thought our app would work; we thought it'd be used, because there's things like Yellow, and Tinder, and stuff, and they're used, and people go on them a lot. We learnt that they make them very addictive, depending on the app. So, like, games apps, they make them very addictive; whereas these apps, they do it, because they pick something that you want to do. So, some people did a weight loss app. Someone did a weight loss app, and we actually thought that was a really good idea, because if, for example, you know this person, and you really like this person, but you're overweight, well then you've got a better chance getting with them if you slim down a bit. So they did that, and they thought that would work quite a lot

Katrina thought ReConnect and her school might be doing the programme

..maybe to think of things like why people use their phones so much, maybe to help you not use your phone – if you know what it is that's bad, you can cut it out, then..

She didn't think the programme had any effect on her own phone use:

No, because I don't – like, I use social media, but I don't go on weight loss apps, and I don't go on – dating apps, so...'

And she did think there were positive aspects to these apps:

Well yeah, because some people – like, I know my dad's really good friend, from when he was at primary, he met this girl on a dating website, and they're married with three kids. So I think, maybe, if he hadn't had that, he wouldn't have met her. Like, I know lots of these relationships don't work, but some do, and if he didn't have that, he wouldn't have had the kids, you know...'

Katrina had found the description of a former world, without mobile technologies, intriguing

[Our teacher] he was good at explaining everything, How it's changed a lot, like, and how it's changed so quickly. and I think, because he came from the era, like, when he was younger, not everyone had phones, but mobile phones did exist, and stuff; so he came, kind of, through a breakthrough era, and he'd seen the changes, like how quickly so many more people got phones than there used to be. Like, he said, you'd have a home phone, and you'd ring your friends on that; and for example, like, you'd go home, get changed, and then he said he had a mate called Dylan, and he knew his mum's number.. And he would just ring them on the home phone, whereas I don't have a home phone.

Yeah, he talked about positives and negatives. It wasn't so much the phone, it was more social media; so he said, like, the good things about having phones is if you don't have to, like, write a letter or anything any more, that everything's a lot quicker, and you can ask people, when you're at home, like, "What are you doing? What are you up to?" but negatives could be that you could be obsessed with your phone, you get obsessed with how you look like on social media, so you're constantly on it, all the time. We had discussions on, yeah, body image. Like, your image on social media. We just talked about body image on social media, how everything on social media is, like what you look like, how many likes and stuff you get, and... Well, I think, because we're all so used to it, it wasn't such of a big deal; but we did think social bullying was really bad, because of your image: if you don't look like everyone's normal image, then people could pick on you.

While logging time spent on paper had been an onerous task, the logging app had worked well and revealed interesting information

We just got given the sheet, and he told us to write down our mobile phone usage. There was a sheet, and we had to say when we were on our phone, and it was like, “How often do you go on your phone, in the day?” I did, the first two days, but – I did it for three days, but then there was so much to put in – because the table was loads! And I would have literally, like... I do my Grade 5 Piano Theory in two weeks, I horse-ride, I do piano, I haven’t got time just to sit down and just do homework and write the... So, I got the app, and I did it for three days, and that was fine. Some people didn’t really do it, but some people did. No one did it for a week. I got this app, and it will tell you when you switch your phone on, and when you switch your phone off, and it would measure the time period.’

I discovered I was on my phone a lot, but it wasn’t for long periods of time. It would be, like, short times, so I’d be on it for five minutes here and there. I had one block, one day, where I sat down for an hour and a half, but that was because I watched a movie on my phone, and that was at night. I thought it was good, because although I was on it quite a lot, some of it wasn’t even a minute, it was just to check the time. I think short and snappy is good. I’m on it, because I look at the time. I’ll probably need to look at the time about six times in a lesson, if there’s no clock; and you know, a lot my classes, there aren’t. I like to know the time. I don’t know why, it’s just, I like to know how long I’ve got for things, because sometimes teachers will forget to remind you. Say, like, if we had to write an essay, then I’ll need to know how fast I need to write, and if I need to...

Katrina told us that most people didn’t ‘take the pledge properly’. She challenged herself to keep her usage to below one and a half hours per day:

We took a pledge to reduce our usage. But not like, extreme, like they’re not going on their phone at all for a week – like, that’s extreme. Nobody did that in my class, but they did do it in other classes. Hardly anyone in my class did it. Some people did. There was probably about ten that did it properly. ‘

My pledge – because it will say on your phone, like, how long you’re on your phone - I said I pledged never to go over an hour and a half every day, of time on my phone. I would probably spend less, but I just thought that’d be reasonable. Well, it depends. If you’re watching a movie on your phone, then that’s an hour and a half, two hours; so then, you’ve already gone over. And I managed that, yeah. Yeah, I did. One day it was really close, it was like an hour and 25 minutes - But other days, it was, like, 59.’

We are quite a sporty school. As you know, loads of people have just gone for athletics trials, and I don’t do any sport in school, but I do lots of sport outside of school: boxing, swimming, horse-riding, netball. So the thing is, like, every day, I always have something on.’

Asked again why she thought the school was doing ReConnect she said

Maybe it’s like reconnecting with your friends, with your family; maybe not being addicted – because we did watch a video, and it was about these kids in China, and literally, they wear nappies because they don’t want to go to the toilet, because they’re always, literally, just gaming on all these apps – I thought that was stupid. I was like, “You can pause the games. It’s not that bad, you can just pause and go out,” and I think their parents are not parenting very well. That might not be a very nice opinion, but that’s what I thought of it: kids shouldn’t be allowed just to sit in the dark, on their own, just gaming – and the thing is, that’s probably because their parents haven’t bothered to do anything with them. Yeah, they’re not being harsh enough. You need to have boundaries. Like, [if there were no boundaries] I would just go and sit in my room in the dark, and go on Instagram for four hours, and Snapchat and Facebook –

I think it would really be your parents and you; but if you know the guidelines that your parents have set, then it’s kind of your decision too, and you can choose when you do it throughout the day. So, that’s what I have with my parents. Like, I have guidelines, and things I’m not allowed to do, but they’re quite flexible.

Katrina saw ReConnect as concerned with addiction, and the ‘bad’ uses of technology:

I think ReConnect – it explained a bit more about what happens if you get addicted to your phone, and the negative outcomes that can come from that. I don't know, like you're shutting everybody out, you're isolating yourself; so you just sit in your room not talking to anyone, or anything. We learned about how it can affect bullying, and we watched a video, and everyone was just stood at their phone. It was like a cartoon thing, and there were people walking off a bridge, just looking at their phone, because they couldn't see. I didn't think that was realistic, because I knew people would see a bridge; but what I did think was bad was of the girl who decided to jump off, and everyone was filming, and they didn't even check if she was okay – And I thought, if everyone's filming her – because I know people do that – and if there's a fight in school, lots of people will film it. Yeah. Or everyone will gang around some people, film it, and then on social media they'll be able to talk to people that maybe weren't in their school, but they'd be like, "Oh, do you know Joey had a fight with Keenan?" or something, for example; and then she'd show them the video, and she'd be like, "Oh, he battered him," or whatever.

But I'd say positives are: you can speak to people from other places. Like, I've got lots of family in Ireland. I'm going to see them on Saturday, to see my great granny; and I talk to her through WhatsApp. And otherwise, I only see her once every year. So it helps me – and I've got family in Amsterdam, so I can talk to them.

Charlie: already mindful about balance

Charlie is in Year 8 at School C. He is an only child, and he thinks his parents are 'good with technology'. Our interviews with him showed a concern with finding a balance between online- and offline- lives, and he told us that he was actively seeking to spend time face-to-face with other friends, rather than communicating via screens and networked games. He valued the interventions from his parents, and suggested that he felt that his friends' choices and patterns of use had an impact on his own online- and offline- lives.

His mum has a phone,

but she only really uses it for talking to people and stuff. Mum works three days a week in an office. 'My mum uses our computer quite a lot for different things and she uses it... well, she uses a computer at work now so she's quite used to using a computer so she uses ours quite a lot at home.'

At home, after work 'she is normally doing like, other jobs and stuff. But, on a Monday she is working in work with computers, and then she goes to a computer course so... I think she goes down to the library to do it, so she is not normally at home during those times, I am just home with my dad.'

Charlie's dad used his phone

mainly to look on Facebook. He doesn't necessarily post anything on it he normally uses it because I go to a Scout group and they have a Scout page on it so he looks on that to see if there are any updates that I need to know about it.'

Charlie got his first smartphone about two years ago when he started secondary school.

I think the first thing I did with it was put my parents numbers into it. So that I had like access to their numbers when I needed them. I was kind of happy because it made me feel a little bit more secure that I had like access to them really quickly.'

We interviewed Charlie before the school had started the three weeks of intensive work on ReConnect in the Humanities curriculum. When describing his use of devices, he told us:

I tend to use them to go on social media and stuff like that. I use it with my phone and my laptop. I tend to use it to go on YouTube and stuff like that to watch videos. I like watching a lot of wrestling videos. I've got a Google account so that I can use YouTube and I can keep track of like the YouTubers that I watch so that I know what videos that they're posting. And I use Instagram occasionally. I normally talk to my friends on Instagram using the messenger service on it. I think it's quite useful because there are a couple of friends who I've got their Instagram on my phone but I don't have their mobile number so I can still keep in touch with them. I only post occasionally. Normally when I go out occasionally because I took a photo... I went on holiday during half term and I posted a couple of photos from there so... I mean because I don't look on it... I normally use it for mostly messenger and stuff like that so... I normally use my Xbox just to play on games. I have an Xbox Live account but I don't necessarily use it much. I normally like playing like wrestling games as well. I normally tend to play with people who come round to my house like directly and that's normally how I play multiplayer.'

Charlie's attitude to time spent on his devices.

I do spend quite a lot of time on it. Normally I spend about two hours a night on it. That's my limit on it. I've got a limit.'

His parents have decided to limit the time he can spend on his phone or Xbox, but Charlie does not think they exercise any other controls to enforce it. He collaborated with his parents, who have a rule that the phone should be left downstairs at night.

I normally leave my phone downstairs because I know it's like safe down there and if it's not downstairs I'm normally using it upstairs... I'm not allowed it upstairs while I'm in bed. So that I don't use it during the night.'

When discussing other people who spend a lot of time on their phones or Xboxes, Charlie told us about his preference for physically hanging out with friends, and made it clear that he values 'getting out'. He explained he had chosen to go to clubs specifically because of this preference, although it was also clear from what he said that he enjoys and values sports for their own sake:

I think it's quite sad because it means they're not necessarily getting out as much to do other things because I now go to three after school clubs at the moment to try and like keep myself off it and like each of those clubs is at least an hour... I just thought it would be a nice idea so that I'd be able to hang out with my friends like straight to face not necessarily through a phone screen. I do a guitar club, I've just started tennis and I do Scouts. It means I'm not on my phone as much because I'm like out doing different things. I've just started tennis so that I can make myself more active as well. I made the decision to join tennis by myself because it was a sport I enjoy doing in P.E. so I just thought I'd like to do a little bit more of that outside of school so...'

From what he told us, Charlie seems to feel that effort is required to keep a balance between 'getting out' and using technology; he said that he thought he might become someone who spends too much time online.

If I wasn't careful enough. I have to be like proper careful about it.'

He thinks it's a good idea to talk about these sorts of things

occasionally... Because it gives you a good perspective on what you're doing and you need to think about how much you're using it occasionally and setting out boundaries about how much you're using it.'

When we went back to speak to Charlie after the programme, he told us that he saw it as aimed at

trying to spend less time on your phones and trying to like, reconnect with other people. I think it was a good idea about doing it, so that we can actually go and see our friends, not just online again, but actually outside... I think it was more like staying off electronic devices completely for the time.

He recalled, unprompted, the Crossing the Line activity. He had learned:

that different people do different things on the internet, and we have different things that we do. It gave you a good perspective on what the people in your class did in their spare time pretty much... I found out that a couple of my friends once or twice did a bit of cyber bullying... We had a little bit of a discussion, like when the people stepped forward Miss asked them, 'Have you ever done it since you did it?' to make sure they don't do it again. I think most people pitch in because most people have views on the topic.'

He also recalled a discussion of appropriate levels of use:

We also did an online survey about how much time we should spend on the internet, and if that was a decent amount of time.' Most people thought 'two to three hours-ish a day is okay.'

Charlie had actively participated in ReConnect by logging his time on his phone and also in taking the pledge week. He was a little surprised at the results of the logging exercise, using the app:

I go on my phone quite a lot in the mornings because I normally like, watch YouTube in the mornings, so I was quite surprised at how much I normally spend on like a Saturday and Sunday.'

I pledged to stay off my phone and Xbox for two hours, from 6pm to 8pm every day for a week. Yeah, it did work. I did quite a bit of reading, and most of the time I am eating during that time so... During that time, like pretty much an hour of that is basically spent either eating or doing something else like washing up or something, so...it would only really have been like for an hour in total, like between 6.30pm and 7.30pm.

I think it was quite good, because I realised how much time I do actually spend on it, and I realised that I shouldn't really spend as much time as I should. Because, I do spend quite a bit, and I thought that I really needed to cut back. Because, I think it is better to cut back so that you have, so you have not spent all your time after school like, just in your room just gaming constantly, that you are actually doing other things.

Charlie's parents normally ask him about school and lessons. He did tell them a bit about ReConnect and he thinks they were

quite glad [our class was] learning about that topic. I just told them what I was doing and when I would be doing it, and that is really all I said about it. They were okay with it, but during that time I had to leave my phone downstairs just to make sure I wasn't on it. Yeah, like when I went down for tea I put it downstairs, and I didn't take it back up when I went back upstairs. The Xbox, I just pretended it wasn't even like in my room anymore. It was a little bit hard, but I kind of got used to it.'

Charlie was successful in cutting back for two hours a day for seven days, but, he says, he didn't tell his mum and dad. 'No, not really. I didn't really say anything.'

We also asked Charlie about teacher and student attitudes to ReConnect and to the pledge week. About his teacher (a PGCE student who was subsequently appointed to the staff)

I think she was quite glad to do it, and was quite happy that we were learning about the topic... I could tell by like the way that we were like treating it, because most of us really

enjoyed it because we were learning quite a lot of stuff, and you could tell that she was happy that we were learning all of it.'

I think a lot of people thought that they wouldn't be able to do it (the disconnect) because they use it so much, and they think they will be too tempted and they will probably like, stop it... We weren't forced to do it. Only the people who wanted to do it had to do it, so there was only about six or seven of us who actually did the pledge and actually did the activity. [The others didn't try] because, they were using it so much, and some of them use it as like a communication to their friends mostly. I think they thought that it was a good idea, but they were unsure about whether or not they would actually be able to go through with the idea....I know most of the people in my class and I know that they use their phones a lot, like when I have been out with them before, so...'

Charlie regretted his friends' lack of participation in the pledge week:

because then it would have, then I would be able to like, go out more with people.

None of Charlie's closest friends tried to disconnect. Charlie thought that using his phone less did cut him off from his friends 'a little bit'.

I was a little bit like, sad because obviously I couldn't get hold of them. Also on the weekend I tried to make arrangements so that I could get out of the house and do stuff. I normally try and do it, normally in the mornings, most of the time I tried to do it from like 10am onwards for a bit. But the thing is most of my friends don't wake up until like ten or something on the weekends so I was like, 'Arghhhh'.

Sherene: being with friends, online and offline

Sherene was a student at School F. She lived with her mother, and had an older sister, now living elsewhere, who works locally, in a shop. Sherene said that her mum tried to control how long she spends on her phone, expressing a concern about school achievement

Sometimes she takes my phone, because she says I'm on it too long. Well, sometimes she says I'm on it like too late. I don't feel good about that (laughter)... but she just says like the amount of time I'm spending on social media I could be doing work, I could be getting higher grades than I'm getting. I could be using my phone to do work, instead of going on like social media...I do do homework as well.'

Sherene thought that her mum was 'sort of right' about this; but she had reasons why she needs her phone.

I need to communicate with my friends, like I need to see what's happening...just communicating with people.'

She said that she was not on her phone all night:

Sometimes I have my phone in my bedroom, sometimes I don't, sometimes I keep it in the living room. But I get the same amount of sleep whether I'm on my phone, or not.'

She thought that talking about control can be a good thing

Like say you're like doing bad things, or like in life you're going down the wrong path. Someone's like trying to persuade you to do good, like they're kind of controlling you, telling you what to do, like that could be good; they're like persuading you in a good way.

But, for her, phone use did not come into this category.

It's like I have a routine, like every day I wake up, I check before I go to school, my social media. And after school I'm on it. It's just because I've been on it for a long period of time,

and like I basically do everything on it. I talk to my friends on it. If I'm not on it, talking to my friends or like checking what people have like posted, or stuff, then say that everyone's talking about it the next day at school, I'm not going to know what they're going on about.'

Sherene started using Snapchat in Year 7. She got her first Smartphone in Year 5. She had phones before that but they weren't Smart. She didn't do a digital time log for ReConnect but agrees that she uses her phone a lot.

However she thought that

most people are on it more than me – like my group of friends. I know that I'm on it less, because they're just more active. Like, say for instance we have a group chat, and I'm always the last person to check the chats. So, I know that like I'm on it less than them.

She also thought she had a balance between her online and offline life. She explained that she was on her phone only at home. When there's no school she was often out with her cousin, at her sister's shop or with friends.

So, then I'm out more than I'm on my phone.'

She listened to music but

...that doesn't count as 'using my phone'

When she was out Sherene didn't use Snapchat because she is already with her friends,

So, there's no need to be on Snapchat. Like, how can I say it? They're taking up my time, so I'm not really thinking about the other people on my Snapchat, until I get home.'

Sherene's Snapchat group was relatively small, mostly her school friends with some additions

Say, for instance, my friend shouts me out on their Snapchat. Their friends would add me, but I don't know them. But then we would get to know each other eventually, because like it's like the generation I live in, it's like really small to us, like everyone knows everyone in a way. So, if I don't know someone, my friend knows them. So, then I would end up knowing them, yeah.'

At home it's messaging this group that occupies her.

Because when I receive messages, my phone does make a sound. Just knowing that I'm getting messages like constantly, it's making me think that I need to go and check it, I need to go and like reply, I need to go and see what everyone's saying, sort of, yeah....No, I don't need to, I just want to, I just - Like, I just get the urge that I need to, because it's just what I've been doing for so long.'

Always having her friends available in person or online is very important to Sherene.

Because like if anything happens, then I could easily like reach out to them.'

She explained that she definitely needed her friends and she has asked for and received support. The reasons for her use were profoundly social. When her sister moved out, the phone was the means by which Sherene tried to fill the void created by her absence:

My sister, she used to stay at my house a lot, but now she stays at her own house. So, like, I used to talk to her and like we used to like just like play around, but now she's at her house, so there's nothing really for me to do, it's just boring. Like, I'm just there with my mum. So, then, I just go on my phone.'

Sherene was engaged by the ReConnect workshops and tried disconnecting for a day:

I went one day without it. I thought [ReConnect] was helpful in a way because it made us like look at things differently, and say that we really do need to cut back on social media a bit...But I couldn't really do any more days...I don't think I could go without social media for a long period of time, because I've like been attached to it for so long.'

When asked what she remembered about the programme, she recalled a workshop where

we was all debating about whether we're addicted to it, or if you're just, like, daily routine. For Sherene her use of social media was her daily routine and, for her, this is normal. The discussions had also led to clarifying her views

People just think that everything is like negative on social media, but it's really not. People use it for different reasons, and for different needs. But we use it for the same, like, needs, as adults, to be honest. But because of the negative things that some people put out on there, it makes it seem like that's what we all do. But it's not.

Jessie: a very persistent user

Jessie goes to School A, a girls' school. In Jessie's family, there was a contrast between the generations in the use of technology. Her brother had an Xbox which he played 'all the time'; her parents spent leisure time with older technologies – her mother read a lot and her father watched TV. Jessie had her own laptop 'for school' and a smartphone. Her mother had a laptop 'for work' which she also used for social networking in her own style:

My mum's on Facebook quite a lot but it's usually her showing me pictures, so like we'll be sat together. She follows me on Instagram but we don't go on each other's accounts, she doesn't really use it anyway.

The family had had a computer which they got rid of because it was 'really old'. Jessie had used it for playing games, but since then the uses of technology that she described were mainly social and for watching films. Jessie belonged to a social group who kept in touch with one another using social media – she described it as a common means of communication regardless of whether they were at a distance or in the same place.

My friends use it quite a lot but like we're always on it together so there's never a point where it's just one person and you realise that it's just one person. [We are] all probably in the same room, yeah, unless when we're home and we're talking on Snapchat or something. Well, sometimes we FaceTime and we can see each other and we're talking to each other – when we're at home (...) everybody's always on their phones, like especially in the form room everybody will be sat there on their phones most of the time (...) everyone's on their phone, like it's not just individual people and usually you're talking whilst on your phone so you don't notice it until someone brings it up.

Jessie's use of social media was closely connected with sharing of visual information (for example, photos taken with friends) and, in common with many teenage girls, concerns with appearance and with finding ways to enhance it:

Mostly travelling pictures, like if I go anywhere maybe like beaches and things like that and then occasional pictures with my friends, just what I've got at the moment there's pictures of me and my friends (...) we have to look through the pictures to check that we're all okay with what our face looks like.

I mean I go on Instagram to get inspiration mostly so... Well, I'm quite into beauty, that kind of thing and there's a lot of accounts that do that sort of thing.

YouTube for tips and instructions, like there's accounts that maybe show everyone's interests like gaming or beauty or just general.

The ease with which the smartphone can be used for entertainment and for access to information as well as social media made it her preferred technology for a variety of media: music, games, films, and also for homework. Jessie used it while she was travelling and had it next to her when she did her homework, using it alongside her laptop; the phone fitted with whatever she needed it for at the time.

I have quite a long bus journey so I'm usually on my phone, whether that's listening to music or playing games and stuff and then we're using our devices for homework which is the first thing we do when we get home, well, me.

Sometimes [watch Netflix on] the laptop, maybe my phone because you can download the apps on the phone and it's just so much easier than having your laptop and then the TV.

Although she used her phone for watching films alone, she valued the social aspect of viewing with other people, describing watching television with her family

Yeah because when you're on your own you're watching it to yourself whereas when I'm with the family there's always a running commentary (laughs). Jessie. We've always said we wanted to go on Gogglebox because it's just hilarious

Her father frequently tried to intervene in Jessie's continued use of the phone, which to a certain extent she valued:

My dad, all the time. He tells me to do other things, like we have jobs in the house, they're alright but...and he does complain about it quite a lot, he's quite bad (...) like sometimes he can be quite annoying but then if you... It's actually being bothered to get up and put the phone down because it's almost as if you're in a trance when you're on your phone, like if you're doing something you have to get the momentum to put it down.

When elaborating about 'the momentum to put it down' she pointed out that times when you realise you are 'in a trance' don't occur spontaneously – they happen when there is an intervention. Jessie discussed what it took to 'control' use, referring to the difference between stopping by herself and stopping as a group in terms of 'feeling that you are missing out on something':

Jessie: you don't really notice it, like only talking about it now I'm realising

Interviewer: if you wanted help with control to get out of the trance what would be the best way to do it for you?

Jessie: Maybe having certain times where my parents don't let me on my phone.

Interviewer: What about controlling yourself or you and your friends getting together to control it?

Jessie: Maybe. I think it's good that we haven't been on it at break or lunch, like I think that's good actually. We all did it as a group. If we were all doing it together and we did it for like – Yeah, because you kind of feel like when you're not on your phone you're missing out on something, like I'll go back on my phone and there'll be like a spam of group chat and then I have to read all the way through it to actually understand what everybody's talking about.

Jessie took part in the ReConnect pledge week, dropping an hour of her use each day, between 7pm and 8pm. Her parents helped to keep her to this. She had found the ReConnect programme interesting, and in contrast to many of the young people we spoke to, she recalled a significant amount. She told us that she found the teacher's willingness to participate particularly relevant:

I feel like it kind of benefitted her as well because she said she completely didn't use Facebook so she felt like she was doing it with everyone as well, like it wasn't just her (...) and it kind of felt like she was doing it so we might as well like (...) because it didn't just show that she was judging us for being young and being part of this era that everybody uses Face-...well, social media in general and that she was using it as well.

Miss had a PowerPoint and each table got given an app that we were to write a bit about and it was actually weird that every single table knew each app, like there wasn't any app that we didn't know of and then we got to think of features that maybe if we were going to create an app what it would be (...) there was a lot of discussion, like there was quite a lot of talking involved. About The apps in general. It was quite a subject that everyone's maybe interested in, well, a majority of the class is interested in so there's a lot to talk about (...) Mostly our accounts because I think we got Instagram and pretty much the majority of the class have Instagram so we were all talking about how many likes we get and stuff like that, it's quite sad really (...) we were all just discussing how many likes we get and it's just likes really but they're quite important at the same time.

For Jessie, the idea of reducing use was not at the heart of the project. Her choice of the time to not use it was strategic:

Well, initially I thought, well, from ReConnect it was like learning about everybody's views on social media and like what everybody thought about it. I didn't initially think that we were going to be doing a project where we were not using it as much as we were initially.

I decided to do not my phone on break and lunch, so not going on it at all and from 7 until 8 o'clock at night no phone. 7 until 8 was fine because that's usually when we have dinner anyway so.....and we're not allowed our phones or anything near the dinner table anyway and break and lunch we're with our friends so we don't really need it and it just stays in my pocket. Well, we're not usually at the dinner table for an hour so usually I clear the table then go up to my room so I stayed downstairs with the family instead of going upstairs.

Although Jessie's reduction in time spent on her device had not been significant, some of the things she told us suggest that she had been stimulated by ReConnect:

Maybe to help quite a few people because sometimes being on social media a lot can isolate you quite a lot and maybe when you're young you want people to experience more things rather than being inside a lot. Our teacher said everything's perfect on social media and maybe that can lead you to get maybe not depressed but quite upset maybe. No, I'd never actually realised but now looking at it everything is quite perfect on it. (...) Maybe it's a bit excessive, like we are on them a lot and it's a bit weird that from doing this project we have only just realised, like we should have realised sooner. (...) I think it's actually really good for people to do because we only did it for a week and it kind of just like –

For Jessie, the positive light in which she held her teacher seemed to have been of particular significance. A further element of the programme that seemed to have stimulated her was the logging of time spent online. She could account for this partly by the length of her bus journey, and the use of the phone for homework, but after homework

then I'm just on my phone and then I go to sleep, so we're on them... it did actually mount up quite substantially when we counted it up [It was a surprise to see by my usage] because time flies when you're on your phone so you don't really realise.

Angel – surprised at her use being questioned

Angel went to an all-girls school, School A, and was in Year 9. Technology had a place in her family life, with the various members using it in their own ways:

My dad doesn't... He comes home late in the night, so he's been working all day, so he does sit down and watch TV, I think, through the night, but then again, it is the only time that he can. It's not like he does have any other time to, and its only for a few hours, so I don't think that he's over-using it. And, my mom, she spends some time on her Ipad, but she got one of the watches. It was a Samsung one or something like that, and so she... It's not like she's constantly looking at it, but if a message comes through, she will reply to it or a Facebook notification, but it's not like she's constantly sitting there looking at her watch or whatever.

She had two younger brothers who "would spend all day on a PS4 if they could". Her own use of her various devices was diverse; she used them to keep in touch with her friends, and for reading, for watching TV and for homework.

Talking to my friends because in real life, you know, because of the school people come from different places, so we can't always see each other. So, I just talk to them through that and also, I read on my phone as well because, you know, you have to buy books and go and get them and stuff. Whereas, you can just access it on your device, so I find it easier to just do that, so I do... I use it for education as well. I've just finished one of Steven Hawking's one, like the Grand Design or something like that, so they're not just fantasy and stuff.

I use my laptop to go on the school website and stuff to see my homework and all that. Well, my phone, I might research something on it. It's easier than getting out my laptop and loading it up and waiting for it all to work. I can just get out my phone and type into Google. It ranges from education to just talking with friends. I use it to edit videos and pictures, and I also use it to watch some shows sometimes, or go on YouTube, or anything, or messaging.

Although she sometimes watched TV alone, using her devices, TV as the basis for social interaction with other family members:

I use my PS4 to watch TV programs. I only use my phone to watch TV sometimes if it gets late in the night and I turn my TV off I'll just be on my phone instead. I watch programs that my family don't, I usually watch them by myself or with my brothers. We're watching the same TV series, but I'm ahead of them, so they're watching episodes that I've already watched, so I would watch it by myself, but then we would talk about it afterwards.

She was not always interested in the social media alerts she receives on her phone

If I'm... I don't sit there and keep checking my phone because obviously it will vibrate or make a sound if I get a message, but then- It depends what it is because if it's- If it's something or someone that I don't like or I'm not too bothered because some devices like Snapchats and you can send... It's like some pictures sent... I just did this thing called Streaks and it's like you just keep this daily counter thing, so it's not actually anything important to look at. It's not a message, it's just to keep something going.

Snapchat and Twitter are pretty much the only ones I use and I have like my school friends on Snapchat and then on Twitter, it keeps me updated on things that I care about. Mostly just the celebrities that I idolise, updates about what they're doing. So, like updates about movies he's doing, or when they're coming out, trailers for it and sometimes the pictures of set or whatever are posted on there.

When asked what she was doing when not on her phone, she said

Like, sometimes I might be going out, as in, with friends or do clubs or something, or I might be writing stuff for school, or doing something like that, or even stuff with my family.

Angel was quite clear that when it came to the use of devices as long as she gave priority to 'what she needed to' there was no reason why she should not be using them:

Yeah. It doesn't bother me because, I mean, as long as I'm doing the work that I need to and what I need to done, I don't see why it should bother me.

Angel's parents had rules for her younger brothers, which she saw as being for the benefit of her parents rather than for them, as they replace their use of technology with indoor activity; Angel gave 'going out to parks' as an alternative that would be preferable.

During holidays or weekends they have a rule for my brothers, there's no screens overall, so TVs, PS4s, phones, whatever from 11am till 4pm and that's every holiday or weekend. (...) They stop going on the screens for that time, but it's not like they're doing anything really huge which would impact their lives differently, if that makes sense, in that time that they're off it. They kind of play with toys together, which they already do on the PS4 or something, so it's not like they're doing anything completely huge. Like they're not going out to parks or whatever. They're still staying inside together and just still playing, but in a different way. So, is that important do you think?

I think when they play in screens they get a bit hyper and so I think it's just more to help mom and dad as opposed to them.

By the time she was in secondary school, similar rules about use of technologies were no longer used, which she explained in terms of an understanding, shared by the family, of a need for devices for homework and also for being in contact with friends:

Like when I was younger, I had that rule, but because of high school and the amount of homework difference or work difference, I do need my device more because they, you know, in primary school, you'd only get one piece a week overall. Whereas, we get some from every lesson on the week, so it's like I do need it more than them.

When I got into high school, you know, you have more friends and I got a phone in high school, so it's, you know, I got given it. I don't really think about if I'm using it too much or too little.

Angel felt that her use of devices fits into what she needed to do, so that she reduced when necessary:

I think it just kind of happens as it does. I'll sit down and I'll do work and it will be like I've used my phone less than I have the previous day because I've been doing more work, but I'm not consciously thinking, "I'm gonna cut back today."

Asked whether she would cut back, she talked about missing being able to do something she needed to do rather than things she wanted to do:

I'm not sure because I think it would depend when I would do it because obviously some weeks we do get more work than others or some weeks I might need to contact someone that I might not the next week. So, say I go away on like a trip or something, I might need to contact my parents more than I would before.

Later, during the interview, Angel said something that helped to clarify why she had no doubt about her use of technology

I think it might vary for different people on what... Because it depends on what someone might need to use it for, because some people might not have as much access to things like family or other devices as I do (...) I think you need to still make sure that you're keeping

your priorities straight, so never put your device above family or work. So, you need to make sure that you're not spending too much time on it and letting all you're your work or friends get behind you and then being more focused on this device.

Given that she felt that she had got her priorities straight, that she had access to family, and was able to put work first, she was surprised at being offered the ReConnect challenge:

when we were asked to take the pledge, like to go against... To put our phones away from, I think it was, 8:00PM until 7:00AM, I think that like surprised me that we... That people wanted us to do that. I don't know how to phrase it. It's like... It's they want us to put our devices away like it's something bad, when they don't actually know what we use it for because I think that a lot of people have this view that we only use it to play games or whatever, but I think it's more complex than just playing.

It's not necessarily a bad thing or good thing. I mean, I don't think I'm going to come away from this project and be like, "Right, I need to cut down and do this." I think I'll just carry on like I had. I don't think it's going to make an impact to my life, but then it might be different for someone else because people react differently, so someone else could come away from this and cut back.

She made sense of the programme in terms of a means by which people could be encouraged to keep up with her work:

I think that [our teacher] thought some ideas about, I don't know, spending less time on screen were good because some people in our class, I can't remember who, but I know that some of them are really always on their devices and they get behind their homework or whatever. They do get affected by it, so it's... I can't remember who, but today someone mentioned that they've been banned from their device and normally they're always in their devices, like on their laptop or whatever, so it might have been because of that they will get behind on work. So, I think he was glad that some people might have become more aware of it, but –

Angel's notion of 'too much time' was

it's just important to know when you need to stop, I guess, because some people might spend too much time on it. Like, one of the videos we saw, some kids were sent away to like this camp type of thing where they didn't have access to any devices or internet for a month or so, I think. So, I think it is a thing that you need to think about like, "Do I need to stop?" But, it doesn't have to be something constant, you know, "Am I doing it? Am I doing it?" Because then I think it might become like an obsessive thing.

Her impression of the ReConnect programme was that it had been rather unrealistic.

I mean, one video, it kind of... It was one of the very first ones and it just kind of shocked me. Like it's kind of harsh in a way on how it was presenting our world with getting into... It was like... So, it was showing like people on their phones, then it was kind of tragic and it was people not getting hurt, so to speak, but like I think in one part of it they were falling off the cliff or something like that, because they were all focused on their phones and not like talking to the world around them. I don't think it represents reality accurately because I think it's over exaggerating like quite a lot.

I just... I don't know. I think that it was made by someone who really wanted people to put their devices away or whatever. To go and interact with people like physically because they over exaggerated how much the devices affect us by putting it too... It can damage our...

Like actually damage us and not just- I just think it's, I guess, wrong because I don't think that that is what is happening with us and our devices.

Throughout the interview, Angel expressed her surprise at what she felt was a misunderstanding of her generation and the role of technology, which she saw simply as consisting of a shift in the way that information is accessed and the way in which people communicate with one another

I know a lot of people my age, they don't watch the news as we might or whatever and we find out a lot about what's going on in the world around us through our devices. Like social media and stuff and a lot of people do talk to their friends through it because they might not be able to see them in real life, so I think- Well, it's just like... I don't know, you know, the elections, and stuff, and what's happened recently in London or whatever. What you see on the news, but you would get it through apps, instead of sitting in front on the TV.

Paula – tracking and reducing her own use

We were struck by one girl, from School C, who, since the project, had been making significant changes to her use of devices.

I was, kind of, like, quite taken aback by, like, how much the effect they are having. I was surprised, because I was, like, I was, kind of, shocked and surprised, like, how much I was using, and I wasn't aware of it, and I felt very grateful for what I do actually have access to, because, I was, kind of, abusing it.

Well, before, it's, like, I obviously knew the difference between a lot and, like, a normal person, but now it's, like, I know what's healthy and what's not a bit more. I think it's important to everyone, like, how many views or how many likes, or comments you get. I don't think it's really helped me, personally, with, like, self-image though. Like, it hasn't told me about not wanting to have all these likes and comments.

Paula had noticed that she was 'making it happen' – that she was being drawn into using her phone through the 'negative feedback loop' described earlier in this report

I found that when, like, I wasn't on my phone, I didn't actually have that many notifications, so, basically, when I'm on my phone, I'm texting people so they have to respond to me. Yes, so I'm making it happen, whereas when I wasn't on my phone I'd probably have one notification and it would just be somebody sending their streaks, like nobody actually, it's sad, but no-one was actually, like, trying to contact me, but you know, normally I'm contacting them and then they're having to respond, so that's starting this conversation which makes me want to be attached to the phone.

In order to make ongoing changes, she had downloaded a 'tracking' app and, with her mother's support, was using it to control her use.

Since I've been doing this project, I've actually got an app on my phone, where if you leave it open in the background, it's called Moment, it, like, tracks how long you're on your phone, how many times you pick it up, how much sleep you're getting. It's always on in the background so I know, like, what's too much, and you can complete, like, challenges. So, they, like, tell you, 'Put your phone down for this amount of time,' and, like, 'Turn notifications off so you're not tempted to pick it all up'. So that app has, like, helped, because I've been introduced into thinking more about it.

My group wasn't told about the app. I found out about it because I was actually on Instagram and it came up as, like, a, what's it called, an advert, and I thought, 'Well, that's actually what I'm doing at the moment, I do need, like, some control over it,' and that's how I discovered it. [I put it on my phone] because I wanted, like, to try and control myself a bit more, because

after doing the project I was, like, 'I probably am using it too much,' so that was just, like, an easy way to try and control it.

Basically, it starts off green and then it, kind of, fills up, and it goes orange and then red. So, red's way too much that you spend on your phone, and then it, kind of, shows you a graph over the whole week, so then every week I'm trying to improve it, because I'm, like, telling myself I need to come off it and that will be my consequences, not getting what I want. A good balance, they say, about one and a half to two hours, but when I started using the app I was doing, like, four and a half to five, but now I've brought it down to about two and a half to three, so it's definitely helped with my tracking.

My mum knows about the app, yeah, and that, because she's always saying, 'How long have you been on your phone today, and that's too much'. She's trying to encourage me to bring it down. Well, the app, like, I can't fake it. Like on the sheet of paper, people can make it up, but the app is, like, tracking it at all points.

Paula didn't tell us what she did at home instead of using her phone, and so we don't know what she felt she wanted to 'reconnect' with; for her, the driver was the awareness of just how much time she was spending on her device, and the way that the use of social media is able to trigger further use. She recognised that there were people who ignored or made no use of the knowledge being offered, and saw them as not interested in changing their habits, and missing the opportunity to become aware of something that for her, was very important.

Some people didn't listen, but that is very true. Like, some people that just had no intention of changing, or trying to change, they were just, like, 'Oh, that's just another video that we're watching in school,' But something needs to make you more aware.

Caleb – a good manager

Caleb lived with his mum, his mum's boyfriend and his two sisters. They all have digital devices. He owned a laptop which he used for school, a broken tablet, and an Xbox and iPhone, the two things he uses most.

'If I have spare time I'll just play on my Xbox; and my phone, I just use for messaging people, and calling, and just being able to get in touch with people. He thinks he uses his phone most 'because I've always got that on me.'

Caleb was ten when he got his first games console and from then on he's always played games. He normally plays racing games or something similar but sometimes he plays online with other people.

One game can last up to a year. Depending how much you play it.

He explained why he liked this:

'It's just like, being able to just... It keeps you out of the way of people, and just keeps you with something busy to do. It's just something fun to do, sometimes; and if it's raining, and you don't want to go out and get completely soaked, and all your clothes ruined, you can just, like, connect up to people on there, for, like, a heads-up. And you can talk to them on there, which is all right.'

Caleb thought he spent about four or five hours a week on his Xbox.

I don't think it's that bad. I don't think it's bad, but at the same time, I don't think it's good, because – because if you're just sat at home all day, gaming, and talking to other people;

because say if, like, it's raining all day, I'll be on there, in one day, about three hours. But if it's sunny, I'll be on there for about one hour. That's about it. I don't go on it every day, but it's like that.'

His digital activity is quite device specific. He doesn't play games on his phone, which he uses mainly for social media.

'I've got Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat; that's the three I use most. I use Snapchat for messaging, and Facebook and Instagram, just seeing what people are up to, and see what they're doing

That wasn't the case when he got his first smartphone when he was in his last year at primary school.

When I first got it, I was just really excited, because it was my first proper phone; so I instantly just filled it up with games, and just constantly played it – I was never off it. Just any sort of games. Just to keep you busy, and have fun with.'

Caleb related his experience with what he saw happening to his sister.

'She's just turned ten and got a new phone, so she's always on her phone, like I was, and that's just what you do when you get a new thing: you constantly play with it. She's permanently on it. I'll go home, she's on it; I'll wake up, she's on it... I do say to her 'Get off your phone.' Because I reckon, she's still about ten, and I didn't even have a phone like that at all – things weren't even made like the one she got – and I just reckon it's a bit annoying, because she used to go outside on the trampoline, play swingball or something like that, and now she's just cooped up in her room. It is quite bad for her, because she needs to get out more.'

For Caleb, Snapchat and other social media took over from games on his phone later when he was about twelve

'It was just something to do, to keep you busy. With Facebook, it's just seeing what other people are up to. It's got, like, funny videos, and people on there, stuff like that, yeah.'

At the point when we met him, social media was taking up 'quite a bit of time'

I do message quite a lot of people on that, like, Snapchat, yeah – and it's got a little bit, like a status sort of thing, like a 'Story' it's called. Like, put a picture of where you are, and you can tell people to meet you, and then they know exactly where you are from the photo. In one way, it's good, because you know where people are, and you can meet up with your friends; but you could just end up being sat in a park on your phones. That has happened before... Not many times. Like, we've normally got something to do, but if there's about three of us, and we're waiting for people, we're normally sat there for about a half-hour or so, on our phones.

In such situations, Caleb says, they do talk to each other but they are on their phones at the same time. There were about twenty boys in his group; four of them he has known since primary school.

Caleb reflected on the idea of 'too much'.

'I reckon, like, it's good that you're communicating with your mates, but it's bad that not all your attention is towards them, because... Ever since I've got older, I've always been on my phone, probably a bit more; and if some people, in the future, just get too attached to their phones, and never talk to their mates, then everyone will just be stuck in. I don't reckon there's too much at the moment, but it could be a problem. If when you're older, you drive

past a park, and all you see is just kids on their phones – not doing nothing, just sat there on their phones – I reckon that would be too much.’

As an example of ‘too much’ Caleb chooses his granddad.

It’s probably not the most likely. But yeah, because he’s got this online poker thing. It’s not real money, but he always needs something to do; he can’t just be sat there doing nothing, so he just plays that quite a lot, every day – probably about four hours a day, actually... Have you ever been sat there, just doing nothing, just bored, and you need something to do? That’s what my granddad is, when he goes on his computer.’

When Caleb has nothing to do he goes on his Xbox and plays games, or sometimes he watches videos on YouTube, usually gaming vlogs.

New things...and it’s sort of interesting so I watch it...There’s these sort of things that you can buy on there, and I don’t normally buy it on there, because I buy it, and then I end up not using it! So, I watch them, to see if it’s good, first. And then I watch quite a few videos on them, to see if it’s good, and they’re good at it; and then if I think they’re good, I buy it..’

Caleb thought that games are not really important but he would be annoyed if he lost everything. He liked the feeling when he completes something:

‘It’s just, like, “Yes! I finally did it,” and things like that. Like, it’s something to look forward to.

He was uninterested in the concept of addiction.

I don’t really think you can get addicted to your phone, because you can live without it. Like, if I had my phone taken off me, today, for a month, I would live. I’d be a bit bored, obviously, but I’d be perfectly fine...I reckon all my mates would be fine if they had their phone taken away for a while.’

Control of Caleb’s phone use was relatively light touch. Some came in the form of occasional social pressure to interact.

Sometimes if I’m constantly on my phone – like, if I go down to the kitchen, and just get in, and then go straight on my phone, because my nan’s sometimes there when I get home, and she’s like, “Get off your phone!” She wants me to get off it, and talk to her. If she’s trying to have a conversation with me, and I’m on my phone, she’ll be like, “Put your phone down for a minute. I reckon that’s perfectly fine. I don’t mind it; like, I will put my phone down... If I just take a while to reply to my mum, when I’m on my phone, just sat like that, looking at my phone and not looking at her, she’s like, “Just stop a minute,” like, if I’m not paying any attention to her But if I am paying attention to her whilst I’m on my phone, she’s perfectly fine with it.’

At home Caleb said people in the family talked to one another.

Sometimes we sit in the living room and watch a film, or something together. Other times, when we’re just not really doing anything, we’re in our rooms – but I’m out for most of the time, so I don’t really know that much about what actually goes on.’ They eat together. ‘We’re not allowed the phone at the table. If we’re in the middle of a meal, and you get your phone out to text someone, in our family, we just get it taken off us. My mum would just take it for the meal, and then at the end, just give it back.’

Caleb's bedtime was between 10.00pm and 10.30pm, which he thought was all right:

They don't want less than seven hours of sleep, for school.'

He can have his phone in the bedroom but mum doesn't like him using it after bed time. Sometimes he is tempted and falls but not for long.

'I've been, like, messaging people. If I'm in bed, and then I was meant to message this person about something – like, if you left something at their house, and then they were meant to bring it into school the next day, I would sometimes text them that night; and then, that would sometimes lead to... there's someone else texted me, and then I'll text them for a long time, and then...

He thinks that talking about control is acceptable because using it too much is bad for you:

'It can be bad for your eyes, sometimes, and things like that; and if you're using it too much, you can be tempted to use it in class as well, and that can get you in trouble.' Caleb thinks the best way to use your phone less is to find something to do...like a hobby or something. 'If you're out with friends, it's easier to find something to do, because there's more people.'

Caleb didn't enjoy the first session of ReConnect.

We saw a video saying, like, with a new world without phones, people would smile when they get low batteries, so they don't have to go on their phone. I've seen the video that before, because that's actually on Facebook, yeah. And I've watched all those videos, and he just shows what's wrong with the world, and what we should change... He's like a persuader, sort of thing. I agree a lot.'

He also agreed with the idea of balance and thinks people should manage their time on phones. He feels he manages his time pretty well and has no problem with the house rules about no phone at meals or when someone is trying to talk to you, you turn off your phone.

'I don't go home and then look forward to going on my phone. I just go home and have something for tea or dinner, something like that.'

He thinks he and his friends could cope without a phone but it would make practical things like arranging to meet much more difficult:

I reckon everyone could cope because, when I'm out, I don't use my phone that much, unless I get a call or text and then I'll answer it and then put it away and then carry on what I was doing. But if I'm talking to someone and they get a call, they will take it and then come back to the conversation because, if someone calls you, you can't just ignore it... On a school day, I probably use it less because I'm in school but, when I'm not on a school day, I don't go out until about, like, 12:00pm-1:00pm, sort of thing, in the afternoon, and I normally wake up about 9:30am-10ish. So, I'm normally up for about an hour and a half before I go out, and that's not just constantly on my phone. That's, like, getting up, showering, eating. So, I'm probably on my phone for about an hour. I will Snapchat someone, do something and then come back to it. At night when I've come in I will probably go on my phone for a little bit more then. Probably for about three to four hours. That sounds like quite a lot...when I go to sleep, I put my phone away.'

Caleb didn't make a pledge for disconnect week:

Well, I think Sir said, "Would you be able to do that?" and everyone just went, "No" and that was, sort of, it.

The Chinese Boot Camp video made him think about being without a phone.

Because if I'm just sat in my room and not doing anything, I'll go on my phone or something. Well, I go on Snapchat and Facebook and YouTube and things like that. It's just something to do. Just something I've done for a long time. It's just something to do every day now. It's just someone to watch, someone that's quite interesting. You still get to talk to your mates when you're not with them. You can watch, like, videos that you've nothing to watch. Like, if people upload every night and you can watch their videos and see what they're doing and things like that... I'm just, like, on my own and everyone's doing other things, I'll just go on my phone or something. Well, things with Facebook and stuff like that, it, like, gets uploaded. A lot of people upload on it. So, it's different things every day. On Facebook, there's just things to watch and sometimes they're quite funny and some are just, like, something to do when you're bored.'

Caleb doesn't upload things himself but he enjoys following vloggers on YouTube.

Well, I reckon it's quite good because... well, in some ways, it's good and other ways, it's bad because they've always got a camera in their hand or right in their pocket or something. Like, if something happens, they're very famous vloggers. There's one guy, he's got about 13 million followers. So, over 13 million people are going to see that video. So, if something interesting happens, he's got to get out his camera straight away and film that. So, that could get, like, a bit annoying every time – He films, like, what he's doing and if something happens, like, he'll show you what he'll do about it and he makes a lot of things and he's got a big collection of big RC cars and things like that and it's just fun to watch. Ever since I've been young, I've always had an interest in cars. So, I've always liked them, all the way from, like, RC cars to big, huge trucks and off-roaders and racers.'

Caleb's uncle and cousin are involved in racing, fixing and building cars:

It's something to do to keep you busy and it's not just sitting on your phone and texting someone. It's, like, physically talking to someone and what you need to do.'

If Caleb had a choice between working on his uncle's racing cars and watching a YouTube vlogger, he would definitely choose working on the cars

because that's a lot more amusing, getting up and just everything to do with cars and all that..

Summary and Comment

When asked to tell us about technologies in their lives, and about their perceptions of the ReConnect programme before it began, two clear themes emerged from students' accounts; that one of the ways in which they were used was to alleviate or prevent boredom, so that *not having them* could mean that they would get bored. The second clear theme was young people's perception that the main way in which time on devices might be replaced was by 'going out'. Spontaneous expression of ideas about other uses or benefits of device-free time within the domestic environment were limited, yet these were the ones often found (and enjoyed) by those who took up the challenge to disconnect.

We do not have data that can tell us how many students took part in the 'pledge week', but we are able set out the themes that we found across the responses of those who came to focus groups and interviews and told us about their experience. Of the many students involved in

ReConnect in the six study schools, those whom we met in focus groups and interviews, told us about their engagement in the pledge week, and shared their experiences and reflections about difference and change. This enables us to show that the experience of time without devices revealed more for them than just ‘time being bored’ or ‘going out’. One striking theme was engagement in everyday activities with family members – talking, cooking, joking, for example, and playing with siblings and with pets, as well as shared leisure activities such as playing cards or going to the woods together.

The patterns of variety and consistency that emerge from the information that we collected from students make it possible to begin to consider young people’s decision-making in relation to use of their devices, and to begin to understand something about the choices that they feel they have about how they spend their time.

8 Discussion

This report brings together the voices of young people, and their teachers, who were involved in the ReConnect project to illustrate their experience of, and response to, a programme that was delivered in diverse ways in diverse schools.

The outcome is, in effect, a picture of diversity in the attitudes and ideas of young people before, during and after the programme. In contrast there is considerable unanimity in schools' and teachers' experience of ReConnect.

To focus on the students, our findings show that the variation in patterns of use of devices amongst young people involved in the ReConnect study were consistent with those revealed by research about young people's use, namely that there were small numbers of extremely low and extremely high users, but the majority were in the middle, that young people who have strong social skills also connect with more people online, while those who are more shy and find socialising difficult are able to connect more easily with others online; that social networks are being used, by many, to extend social connectedness and strengthen social ties; and that the time spent by the majority of participants fell beneath the thresholds at which wellbeing was harmed, as suggested by the Goldilocks hypothesis study.

We found that among the high users, young people were using a range of devices: gaming, consoles, phones or tablets for watching video, mainly YouTube and Netflix, and phones for social media. Consistent with findings of other research projects described in the review of literature, we found that smartphones were embedded in varied and multiple practices of work, care, pleasure and sociality, and young people's descriptions of their use support the observation by other researchers that they cannot be disentangled from these practices in a simple and straightforward manner. For example, young people needed them for checking the time, to access everyday information such as bus timetables, and to be able to make arrangements with family members about when they would be back at home. And as might be expected, during our conversations with young people and teachers we heard ideas about overuse and a view of what is 'too much' that echoed the prevalent media discourse around the dangers or drawbacks of digital devices. Perhaps in part as a consequence of this discourse, the approach taken by ReConnect was, in some cases, interpreted as aligned with the notion that young people *should* put their devices away and that switching off is good for them, and this met with considerable resistance.

About half the young people who were surveyed, felt that they used devices more than they should. The programme had an impact on the attitudes and behaviour of a proportion of those who engaged with it; the outcomes from pledge week (for example, discovering a pleasure in spending time with family members, enjoying reading, spending time drawing) can be taken as evidence that displacement does indeed mean that at least some young people are missing out on some things that could support the development of skills and relationships and are also enjoyable. However, some people were hard pressed to find something to do when they weren't on their devices.

We consider these findings below in relation to questions about autonomy, agency, and the role of the ReConnect project in empowering young people in this respect.

What has the project been able to tell us about young people's own sense of agency, autonomy and decision-making in respect to their use of digital devices?

Young people told us that they were the ones who should control the time they spent using technology, but examples in which they described themselves as readily able to do this were the exception rather than the rule. It was not uncommon for them to tell us that it was difficult to control the time they spent online, and some referred to a lack of ease with which a user can 'come off' their device, often because of the 'flow' of engagement with other people through social media. We also heard some observations from young people that were highly consistent with the notion of the 'negative feedback loop': for example, the description, given earlier in this report, of one girl's discovery that reducing the contributions she made within her social network reduced the number of interactions she felt she had to keep up with, thereby releasing her from some of the 'hold' she felt it had on her.

In discussions about who was controlling or not controlling their use of devices, the contributions of young people, almost without exception, referred to use at home and at particular periods in the day. The examples that predominated discussions of control fell into three main categories: shifting from social activity with friends (on devices) to social activity within their families; shifting from online activity to sleep; and stopping playing games while in the flow of working to reach a level. The difficulty, in each case, was the effort or frustration in moving away from something they found compelling or worthwhile. Although young people often found parental interventions annoying and frustrating and sometimes described being angry about this, most saw parental rules and controls (when they were clear and consistent) as welcome and helpful to them in managing their device time and negotiating between 'want to' and 'need to'.

It seems significant to think about what was *absent* from the examples that young people gave us when discussing control. There were no references to experience of ease of control – young people's ability to put their devices aside when there is something that they actively want to do. This may arise from the way in which questions were framed, and/or the way that they were interpreted; but it is notable that the interpretation of reducing use is consistently one of *stopping doing something that they find compelling in order to do something that they find less alluring*. There were no references to anyone having difficulties disengaging from phones or gaming devices to participate in offline activities that they enjoyed and valued; no-one said anything about missing football, for example, or a meal or an event or a party because they couldn't get off their device.

This is consistent with the points put forward earlier in this report (section 3.1.4) that where offline activities and resources are available to support young people's goals of pursuing 'possible selves' and identities, a move from online- to offline- activity would amount to shifting from one 'want to' activity to another (rather than 'coming off' a device because of another person's advice, which would constitute an externally motivated, 'have to' reason).

Activities and resources that are offline and through which young people would be able to 'possible selves' and identities, may be easier to access in some locations and social contexts than in others. Examples of the activities that were available locally and which young people were choosing to take up were youth clubs (which were available for young people in the inner-city school), local football clubs, being involved with horses or swimming, and having relatives who involved the young people in valued activities (e.g. mending racing cars). This

leads us to pose a question about the availability of offline activities; what do young people think of as available to them as alternatives to ‘being online’?

When talking about what they might do during ‘disconnect’ periods when they wouldn’t use their devices, the frame of reference for many of those we spoke to seemed to contrast two kinds of activity – either spending time ‘outside’, or being ‘on devices’ – despite the fact that ‘being on’ one’s device is as much a possibility outdoors as in. This seemed to be some way related to the discourse of ‘ills’ associated with sedentary activity, as much as with the possibility that ‘going outside’ might offer for continuing to be involved in social activity with their peer group, away from parents or teachers. These responses can be taken to suggest that for many young people, there is no ready store of ‘go to’ activities that they can do instead of using their phones, but possibly also that ‘not having anything to do’ is more of an issue for them than older people suspect. For those of us who grew up before networked personal technology, the idea that the everyday world offers avenues to explore and has inherent potential to be worthwhile and interesting, is an assumption that parents, teachers and other adults hold without realising it. We expect young people to be sympathetic to the message that simply ‘putting down your device’ will enable the possibilities that are around young people to present themselves. It may be that adults rarely think about the act of looking around for things worth attending to or pursuing in terms of a skill that they have developed. It may worth paying attention to this: are we justified in expecting that young people share this skill, or is it a habit that needs support and practice if it is to develop?

The point about the need to make effort to find things was neatly made by some young people. One boy said:

Just because we sort of realised that there are actually things there to do. We just think that there’s nothing to do because there’s nothing immediately there, so we just immediately go to technology for answers, but –

The same point emerged in a discussion between a boy and girl during a focus group.

- Boy: I sometimes think about, what would have happened if the phone was still like just basic, you just have to have a briefcase. What if the phone was still like that today, what would people do?
- Girl: They would find something.
- Boy: (repeating) They would find something.
- Girl: But, we can’t think of it now, because the first thing we think of to do is go on the phone.

Perhaps the challenge of finding something to do when you are bored that has characterised teenage and childhood life for decades, if not centuries, has been removed from young people’s lives. If the widespread use of devices is indeed interfering with young people’s lives, perhaps it is not so much that they are ‘disconnected’ so much as a lower incentive to develop habits of looking at the world around them with attention and interest, a starting point for finding things that they can do. One boy, Jerry, told us that he was “off his phone for three hours” because his mother took it from him. He said he felt ‘strange’ not being on it ‘because I didn’t know what else to do. Like, when I was sat in the car, I would just sit there, and then it was really boring. I didn’t know what to do with my hands.’

To what extent did engagement in the project empower young people to be informed and autonomous decision-makers with respect their own use of digital devices?

We begin our discussion about empowerment with reference to the notion of the ‘negative feedback loop’, described in section 3.1.4, by which people’s continued use of devices is, at least in part, related to the fact that others are using theirs.

The points that we have drawn out concerning imagined alternatives to using devices can be taken to suggest that there is a second ‘negative feedback loop’ operating for young people, namely, the assumption that ‘there is nothing else to do’ which seemed to propel some young people back to their devices. We suggest that finding things to do, or imagining what you could do, without your devices, is a skill, or a habit, that receives little attention.

For many of those who took up the ReConnect pledge week, the experience was ‘eye opening’ because of a realisation that there were things in the domestic environment that could hold their attention, and be pleasurable and satisfying. In this sense, the project was ‘reconnecting’ them to things around them, and some spoke of a resolution to spend more time involved in those things – playing with the dog, taking to the family, and so on. The question of whether they felt empowered by the experience, however, is less easy to answer. It was not clear that any of the young people who found it difficult to ‘come off’ their devices now felt that they had discovered their own agency in respect to their use. Consistent with the recommendations by the young people involved in the “Internet On Our Own Terms” report¹⁸ that social and technological tools should be available to help young people manage their use, young people seemed to welcome the interventions that their parents put in place to restrict use in the domestic environment, and to value the reasons behind them, and there were some very clear examples of young people trying out technological interventions (such as monitoring apps) and finding them useful.

We were struck by the variation in interest in and recall of the content of the ReConnect programme as delivered in the sessions in the school. When asked to talk about it in interviews and focus groups, the example of the Chinese Boot Camp predominated, and we did not gain a sense that there had been a thorough engagement, in many cases, in peer discussion or in individual reflection on the role of devices in young people’s lives. As we have commented, the focus group interviews show that the project could be very different in ‘flavour’ between and, importantly, within schools, and this had an impact on young people’s engagement in what it had to offer and their interest in the ideas and discussion.

Of all the activities students were invited to undertake as part of the ReConnect programme, logging time spent on devices produced the most striking outcomes. Not all students engaged with this activity but many of those who did found the results surprising, even shocking. Others found it reassuring. Self-reflection or class discussion of the results often led to insights, intention to change behaviour, even actual behavioural change.

9 Notes

Note 1

The What about YOUth study measured wellbeing using the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). The scale consists of a list of statements about feelings and thoughts. It asks respondents to choose a response from five options, which vary from *some of the time* to *all of the time* that best describes their experience in relation to each statement over the last 2 weeks. The statements are: *I've been feeling optimistic about the future. I've been feeling useful. I've been feeling relaxed. I've been feeling interested in other people. I've had energy to spare. I've been dealing with problems well. I've been thinking clearly. I've been feeling good about myself. I've been feeling close to other people. I've been feeling confident. I've been able to make up my own mind about things. I've been feeling loved. I've been interested in new things. I've been feeling cheerful.* It was developed to enable the monitoring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing.

Note 2

An earlier draft of the report <http://casma.wp.horizon.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Draft-Internet-on-Trial-iRights-youth-juries-resport.pdf> provides more detail of the technological and social tools suggested, as follows:

- *Provide a health warning pop-up on users' phone, computer screens, and other connected devices. Generate pop ups that pause a game or Internet use or mobile use after you've completed a level or having spent an hour and a half. Pop up says you're reaching your time limit. Create coding in the games itself to stop you going into your setting to change the time and keep playing. Create a condition for users to take 15 minutes break before returning to using their gadgets.*
- *Create a cut-off point for all Internet use to help users better manage their time spent online.*
- *Timer: Websites should have a timer and a recommended usage period with government guidance.*
- *Tax: After you use the recommended time, you have to pay. This is based on the logic that people spend so much time on the Internet because it is free while other activities incur costs and the Internet is easily accessible. So, if users are taxed on the hours they spent online beyond the recommended use, they will cut down on the amount of time they spend online.*
- *Ask friends to intervene for you and find other activities. (But don't let the providers regulate or 'throttle' you like how mobile companies throttle data after you pass your limit.)*
- *Children should be encouraged to socialise more when they are younger. School should arrange more outdoor activities.*
- *Introduce a notification time zone to be applied to all Internet users that automatically switches the Internet off between 9.30pm and 7am.*

Note 3

There are two superficially comparable projects, both based in New South Wales, Australia. The 'Switch-Off 4 Healthy Minds'¹ took place in 2014. In this project, 322 fourteen-year-old students from eight secondary schools were selected as participants. The programme began with a session at school, on the consequences of excessive screen time and the benefits of reducing it. This was followed up by messages sent via social media, such as: *"Many Australian adolescents spend more time on screens on the weekend. Why not plan your weekends in advance?" "Have a competition with ur m8. Who can go the longest without checking their social media account (Facebook/twitter etc.)" "If you're watching TV or using the computer, don't forget to walk around and stretch. It's easy and good 4 u, u can do it!"*

During the second month of the programme the teenagers were asked to sign a screen time behavioral contract which described appropriate replacement behaviour. It encouraged them to create their own list of potential screen time rules, including the benefits of limiting screen time, possible barriers of limiting screen time, possible solutions to such barriers and consequences of exceeding screen time limits. Each month during the project the parents of the teenagers involved received a newsletter which encouraged them to set consequences such as *"loss of privileges to TV, Ipad, phone etc. for a period of time"* at the same time as giving advice that parents interacted with teenagers in a 'needs supportive' manner and to manage conflict arising from attempts to reduce recreational screen-time, e.g. *"Explain to your teen why it is important to limit their screen-time"*

The project was reasonably well received by students, according to a questionnaire asking students to rate its helpfulness on a possible range from 1 to 5, for which the average score was 3.5. The effect of the project was,

rather strangely, measured using a questionnaire about time spent on sedentary activity of all kinds, which students at the school filled in both before and after the study. The questions refer to sedentary activity during the week and at weekends, and the categories included were

- *Screen time*: watching TV, watching videos/DVDs (digital video discs), using the computer for fun.
- *Education*: using the computer for doing homework, being tutored, attending Saturday school.
- *Travel*: by car, bus, train or boat.
- *Cultural activities*: reading for fun, doing crafts or hobbies, playing/practising a musical instrument.
- *Social activities*: sitting around (chatting with friends, chilling), going to church.

The results showed that by the end of the project, less time was being spent sitting down, but this was also the case for the control group – an equivalent group of students, who did not receive lectures and text messages. There was no information about young people’s comments or opinions about control or their own sense of agency, and indeed, despite the reference to a theoretical underpinning for the project, the project appeared to have been based on an idea that given certain forms of information, teenagers could be persuaded to do what other people said was good for them.

The second example was another intervention named ATLAS (Active Teen Leaders Avoiding Screen-time) carried out by the same team. The target was in this case teen obesity and involved substantial promotion of sport². In common with the ‘Switch-Off 4 Healthy Minds’ intervention, the title of the programme carried an underlying assumption that screen-time was the reason that young people spent their time sitting down, but the assessment of change in sedentary activity was for all kinds of time that might have been spent in sedentary activity.

¹Babic, M., Smith, J., Morgan, P., Lonsdale, C., Plotnikoff, R., Eather, N. & Lubans, D. (2016) Intervention to reduce recreational screen-time in adolescents: Outcomes and mediators from the ‘Switch-Off 4 Healthy Minds’ (S4HM) cluster randomized controlled trial. *Preventive Medicine* 91:50–57.

²Smith, J., Morgan, P., Lonsdale, C., Dally, K., Plotnikoff, R., & Lubans, D. (2016) Mediators of change in screen-time in a school-based intervention for adolescent boys: Findings from the ATLAS cluster randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 40:423–433.

10 Appendix

The following provides more detail about ReConnect lessons.

The example in the table is the plan used for young people at Key Stage 3, and is taken from the Scheme of Work as set out on a shared document dated December 2016.

Lesson 1: Hyperconnectivity / You've heard it all before...

[Eric Pickersgill's photos](#) [www.removed.social](#) and Prince Ea's video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRI8EIhrQjQ> are a springboard for class activities and discussions. The class will discuss their own screen habits and react to YouTube comments on [Prince Ea's video](#).

These activities set the stage for themes that will reappear in later lessons: identity construction; mental health; power and control. Teachers should be mindful of less confident students, perhaps organising the class into balanced groups.

Students are tasked to keep a diary of their screen habits to present in the next lesson. They also need to fill out a short, anonymous questionnaire that will be used to evaluate the project. This requires access to a computer, tablet or smartphone. If it is not possible to do this in the classroom, it can be set as a homework task, but we ask you to please facilitate this stage as it will provide valuable evidence for the project and your school.

Lesson 2: Communication & Identity

Having sparked a self-awareness about the amount of time students spend using screens in the first lesson, Lesson 2 explores how young people's increasing use of the Internet is changing the way we construct individual and group identities. Identity creation on social media platforms and in the media can be both creative and harmful – here we look at examples of both. Anonymity, for example, allows for individuals to explore new ideas and establish relationships more freely and without judgment, yet it can also be dangerous. The lesson ends with a fun activity looking at how screens have allowed language to evolve rapidly, too.

Lesson 3: Processing - algorithms and thinking

The resources used are a 'Big Bang' clip about algorithms

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0xgjUHEG3U> and What the Internet is Doing to our Brain' video www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKaWJ72x1rl

This lesson is not supposed to scare the students into thinking that the Internet is one big power conspiracy waiting to explode! It is supposed to promote awareness and discussion regarding the invisible forces, such as algorithms and coding that influence any Internet user. It then considers the impact the internet can have on our thinking.

Lesson 4: Health & Wellbeing

Resources used for this lesson are Pokémon GO video -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRwdC-zMIJ8>

Chinese Internet bootcamp video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4VztCWchw>

The relationship between screens and mental and physical health is a big topic – an hour lesson can only really scratch the surface. In this lesson we focus on mental health primarily, but in the knowledge that mental and physical health are not mutually exclusive.

In the first half of the lesson we explore the damaging effects screen and social media can have on young people's health. In the second, we discuss how screens can improve mental and physical health, using Pokémon GO as an example of how screens and gaming can impact health positively.

The lesson on health and wellbeing is the final lesson before we focus more in-depth on the challenge week. The Crossing the Line activity and Take Home activity are thus designed to promote further self-awareness among students regarding their screen use, preparing them to make personal goals and targets for the challenge week.

Lesson 5: Up to a Challenge?

The resource used for this lesson is Dartmouth Park Talks video - <https://vimeo.com/162389508>

In lesson 5 we lead on from discussions about addiction in lesson 4 to get the students thinking specifically about the prospect of reducing their screen time (possibly completely). The Take Home activity will have introduced them to ideas about what life was like with a much lower prominence of screen in daily life. Now they can begin to consider what their own lives would be like with less screen.

After briefly discussing the Take Home Activity from lesson 4, we advise showing the ReConnect Project video from Dartmouth Park Talks. The aim of the video is to both re-introduce the premise of the challenge, as well as hear from students who have already tried it. The rest of the lesson's activities allow each student to plan their week and define their own personal challenge.

If the school feels it would be a good idea, one way of making students more enthusiastic about the challenge is to make it competitive and offer prizes for the winners, or prizes for the best Take Home activities etc.

Lesson 6: Evaluation and responsibilities (or rights?)

The students have completed the challenge! In this final lesson we reflect on the students' time offline and ask whether it has made them consider any long-term changes to their screen habits and their offline lives.